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# MEDITATION

## PURE & SIMPLE

*The Heart And Essence Of  
Meditation Practice*



DR. IAN GAWLER











## MEDITATION PURE & SIMPLE

To evolve the body into a state which lets go of the busyness of life and opens the possibility of entering into the natural ease of meditation.





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*The heart and essence of meditation practice*

DR. IAN GAWLER  
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*New Age Books*

ISBN: 978-81-7822-340-7

First Indian Edition: Delhi, 2009

First Published in Australia by  
Michelle Anderson Publishing Pty. Ltd. in 1996

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*Published by*  
**NEW AGE BOOKS**  
A-44 Naraina Phase-I  
New Delhi-110 028 (INDIA)  
Email: nab@vsnl.in  
Website: [www.newagebooksindia.com](http://www.newagebooksindia.com)

*For Sale in India Only*

*Printed in India*  
at Shri Jainendra Press  
A-45 Naraina Phase-I, New Delhi-110 028



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## *Acknowledgments*

Any book of this nature is bound to be a product of the author's life view. So any gratitude you may feel for the work is best directed towards those people and experiences that have shaped the author's life.

In this case of course, a great debt of gratitude is due to all three of my parents — father, mother and stepmother.

Then there are so many friends and teachers who have positively shaped my understanding of life and approach to it. Also the apparently "difficult" people — the ones who challenge you, your expectations, your beliefs, your understanding. So often the most powerful challenges are the ones that help you to find out what you really do hold true. In a perverse sort of way, the horrors are often the ones that warrant genuine gratitude.

Thanks also to Robbie Schuurman for a wonderful job of typing, typesetting and useful suggestions. Also my colleagues Bob Sharples and Dr Craig Hassed who commented constructively on the text. A hearty thanks to my publisher Michelle Anderson for her patience as this work incubated and took shape; and then for her useful guidance in finalizing the work. Finally, thanks to Fred Kroh, Melbourne Weekly for the photographic portrait, Derek Hughes for the wonderful cover photo of the Olgas, and Deborah Snibson of the Modern Art Production Group.



## CHAPTER 1

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# THE HEART AND ESSENCE OF MEDITATION

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In the centre, the very heart of Australia, dwells a remarkable rock formation. It is known as The Olgas — or more traditionally, Kata Tjuta. Peculiar name, extraordinary place. The temptation to say it “dwells” rather than “lies” or “is located”, is because this place has a presence which is obvious when you first enter it.

True, the visual impact of the place is striking enough. Classical beehives built of red and ochre striations of rock. Almost dripping off a massive slab of similarly coloured rock. Almost dripping off and out, out across a flat desert plain that flows on, apparently unendingly, way beyond the horizon with its own golden blue and red haze.

Yes, the visual impact is bound to strike you. But it is the silence that really does it! That really touches you — tangible silence. The silence of the special place. Sacred silence. A silence that as you enter into it, you feel it penetrating through you. You feel your finest thoughts stirring, you feel it drawing out your best, inspiring your highest motives and ideals. Amidst the busyness and erstwhile craziness of modern life, it is the silence that brings a gentle sigh of relief, a refreshment to the

soul, sanity to the everyday moment. It is the silence that restores the gentle, good humoured smile of inner contentment.

So it is wonder-full to visit such a place. And surely we have all been to such places. Those special locations that do indeed dwell in nature. They wait patiently for us, a bit like the welcoming arms of a loving mother. Waiting to wrap us once again in their silence, to touch our inner being and restore us for the journey.

Such places too come to form our key memories. Memories to hold like our most valuable treasures. For these places can sustain us as they affirm what we all hope for. That there is good intent at work in this Universe of ours. That Nature does have a good heart and that we too, in our essence, are pure and whole. In those places, we touch all that. Nothing is said. Nothing is done. Yet we touch it. It is tangible. It is real.

So we need to seek these places out. For going there is like making an investment. An investment in life. For going there, touching the silence there, being restored there, flows with us. These special memories become the stuff upon which we can draw. In moments of adversity, of doubt, confusion, trauma or trial, such memories offer an irresistible foundation of goodness and surety. A foundation upon which our own goodness grows.

Surely too, we all have met people who have this same gentle, yet profound impact. Personally, I think of "Weary" Dunlop. That wonder-full old soldier, surgeon and senior elder of Australia. To be in his presence was just the same. To have been able to bask in his presence lingers in my memory as a sustaining gift. I have been blessed to meet with several great spiritual masters,



healers and "ordinary" people, who had this quality. This presence. This gift of sacred space they could offer, grant, bestow. Unselfconsciously, unpremeditated — a mere gift — a gift born no doubt of their own life's struggles and conquests, that culminated in this presence. The quality of sacred space, an atmosphere of deep abiding silence and presence.

So now the point of all this. It is possible to experience, to touch, to enter into this sacred space, this silence, by going to special places or being with special people. But there is something else you really need to know — if you do not already know it. You can experience that same quality within your self. Because it dwells within us all. We were born with it. It is our birthright. It is our natural, true state. And you can experience it directly. By doing so, you start to realize who you really are. You start then to live who you really are.

In your heart's essence you are whole and pure. Perfect. And the good news is, that if you doubt this, if you have forgotten, or are just plain unsure, you can test it for yourself. You can learn how to let go of the busyness of life, the distractions, the pain and even the pleasantness. Let go of all you are familiar with on the surface, and delve deep into your own depths. And find out what is there. In your essence. In your own true heart. What will it be? When you find the answer, when you know, when you experience it directly, you will be free. What will it be?

Everyone who has ever made this journey, this journey to encounter their own true nature, this journey that we are all on; everyone who has ever made this journey, talks of the same things, in the same way. In gentle rap-  
idly contented, all-encompassing smile.

they talk of intrinsic purity. The fact that in our essence we are pure — pure and whole.

In our essence, we are pure and whole. Perhaps the best news we ever had! They all say it. All who have experienced it. In our essence we are pure and whole! What a relief! Pure and whole. All of us. In our essence. Pure and whole.

To know this for sure, to know this from direct, personal experience, is to be free to live naturally.

This direct knowledge frees our physical body from tension, strain and pain. It frees our body to regain its natural balance. And, in this balanced state the body is free to reactivate its immune system and its own healing potential which has the power to restore and sustain good physical health.

To experience our own true nature, purely and simply, restores our faith in our self. We are free to relate well with our self and from this base, relate well with others. Our emotions reflect a natural good balance, a natural good humour. The ability to love and to be loved flows easily.

So too this experience flows into our mental life. Clarity is what strikes people most. An inner clarity, a resulting ease in making decisions; making choices that just seem to work well in the personal flow of life.

And then too the spiritual dimension. This inner reality may well be experienced as a religious experience, to be integrated and expressed in the light of our own religious background or training. Certainly, this experience is the essence of all religion; yet it transcends it too, for it provides direct experience. Like tasting your first



banana. Listening to other people describing what it might be like, reading books of others' experiences — all useful and inspiring — as may well be our own pondering. But nothing like our own direct experience. To peel the fruit and taste it fully. Ahh — once we do that — we know! There can be no doubt; no need for supposition, argument or wonder. We know. This is it! Direct experience.

Now the key to all this is to be found in the simple silence of profound meditation. Why silence? Because in silence we are still. When we are still we are not doing anything. When we are not doing anything there are no distractions and we have the opportunity to find out if there is any substance behind all the distractions. When we are truly, deeply still, we are left with our essence. Our innermost core. Our own true nature. The direct experience of who we really are. And the fact is that meditation offers direct access to this silence, this experience, this presence.

So this book is offered out of respect for my own experiences — with places, people and inner space. It is my hope that this book will assist you towards your own direct experience.

Now you may well fantasize and think me a better exponent of all this than I really am. But all I can offer is the personal experience of one who has been genuinely touched by the presence of special places and special people. Who has had their own life touched, even transformed, by the practice of meditation based upon Simple Silence, and who has been blessed indeed to introduce this practice to a number of eager people.

Why this book came into being is that it strikes me that meditation based on Simple Silence offers extraordinary benefits on all levels of our being. And to practise this type of meditation is both exquisitely simple, and yet for many, excruciatingly complex. Books that I am aware of so far on the subject, have tended to emphasize the quality of the experience. Most have been deliberately vague when it comes to technique. Deliberately because they reason that to experience Simple Silence there was nothing to do — all that you need “to do” is to be silent. Just be still! Obviously again, if you are still, you cannot be doing anything! So if you were to become preoccupied with technique, or “how to do it right”, it would only serve to keep you busy, to actually hinder the quest, the quest for Simple Silence.

I fully accept the validity of this reasoning. It is compelling because it is true. Yet it is a bit like saying to a really stressed out friend — “What you need to do is to relax!” Great advice! Yet how to do it? So often the problem I encounter as a teacher of meditation is the frustration of unrealized meditators! People who have made a start, who know what they are seeking, know the benefits, even know the theoretical simplicity of it all; yet these are people who are frustrated in their ability to experience the silence and who are often confused and uncertain with what to do. Indeed, often enough, these people are just as confused with what has been happening during the times when they have been practising already.

So, this book is offered as something of a paradox. A detailed, perhaps somewhat longwinded exposé on the art of being silent. How to be still, how to do nothing, in great detail!



Trusting you appreciate the humour of detailing how to do nothing — just being still — I would say that I do meet a few people who can do it easily, and almost effortlessly. They learn to meditate quickly, deeply, effectively — purely by being still! Why not? After all, there is nothing you need to do. Just be still and rest in Simple Silence! Yet, in fairness, very few can do it so simply, and they usually annoy the rest of us greatly! So be heartened; for most it does take time, learning, and patience. However, experience convinces me that everyone can learn to do it. It has to be possible as this silence dwells within us all. Yet given all that, for some, it really takes some work.

So this book will help you learn how to do it. To rest in Simple Silence. The book is the fruit of many years, many people's experiences. Living and teaching this practice virtually daily, over the years insights have come, people have taught me, I have stumbled over better ways to introduce it. So the book is offered in the hope that it will clarify, simplify and make meditation more directly accessible for you.

There have been many mentors to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude and to whom this work I trust in some small way will stand tribute.

Most particularly, in the beginning there was Dr Ainslie Meares. Psychiatrist, radical thinker and innovator. One of the major figures that has restored meditation in modern times to its rightful place as a leading self help technique and the basis of restoring a health full life. Dr Meares shared his presence with myself and so many others and in doing so touched us with the extraordinary possibilities of entering our own personal inner world of silence. A man of delightful paradoxes, I was

blessed to have Dr Meares act as a mentor and sounding board in the early days of teaching meditation.

Then in more recent times, in fact for over ten years now, I have been doubly blessed to have Sogyal Rinpoche as a teacher. This delightful and profound Tibetan Lama teaches Dzogchen, the highest form of Buddhist meditation. Highest — as it goes directly to the essence of meditation, the essence of our being. Yet simplest too, as in this approach the emphasis is on entering the sacred realm of silence.

So with his own presence, wisdom and knowledge, Sogyal Rinpoche has been able to assist greatly — both personally and in what I have been able to offer as a teacher.

Then too, I would like to acknowledge my own father. Perhaps this is why the value of silence is so clear to me. How well I remember as a young boy the reassuring comfort of being in my father's presence. In fact it was the times when nothing was said, those silent times, when the presence was felt most easily and strongly. Now I do recognise that for some, the childhood memories of silence were of unhealthy silences. The silence of inadequacy, of withdrawal, of non-communication, resentment, hopelessness or despair. Yes, there can be an unhealthy silence, but for me with my father, just traveling in the car together, doing some activity together that was almost mechanical, gave the opportunity, almost the excuse, to share time, to feel the presence. What a strength. What a reassurance. So thanks Dad, this is a present you may not even know you gave me, yet it is the basis upon which my life has been built.



How then, with such wonderful mentors, can I presume to add to what has been written already? When Sogyal Rinpoche, out of the depth of his meditative tradition, has produced such a remarkable book as "The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying", it seems presumptuous to offer something else.

Well, if it is useful, perhaps it will be because this book comes from the personal experience of a Westerner who has struggled to grasp and apply these simple yet profound concepts and techniques. In my experience, good teachers are ones who have desperately wanted and needed to know for themselves what they now teach. Usually the best teachers are those for whom the personal learning was difficult. Driven by the imperative imposed by their desperate need, they had to struggle and give full attention to their own learning. That certainly fits my own history and experience. Then I have been blessed by being presumptuous enough to offer to teach something of what I learnt myself. Then fortunate to work with so many people who trusted me enough to try all this, to give feedback, to learn from their own mistakes, to be patient and kind and to help me learn from my own mistakes. And gradually, between us all to have something worthwhile to offer.

So, if you find a clarity in all this, please acknowledge all the people who have shared their experiences with me. My obvious teachers, and the many "students" who have been, in fact, perhaps the best teachers of all.

I feel myself at best to be a translator, a conveyor of an ancient wisdom that has a compelling modern need. So welcome. We are about to journey into a sacred space. Your own inner space wherein lies healing, sustenance

and truth. The place wherein dwells Simple Silence. The realm of Meditation — Pure and Simple!



## CHAPTER 2

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# MAKING SENSE OF MEDITATION

## A Theoretical Framework

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To obtain the maximum benefit from this book and the approach it presents, it is recommended highly that you use it as a workbook. While it will make an interesting read and have benefit if you cruise through it from cover to cover, the intention is to help you actually enter into a more profound experience of meditation. So the book emphasizes the practice of meditation and the practises offered are best experienced. You are likely to benefit most by actually doing them!

So take your time and plan to work your way through the exercises methodically. Each step will be explained along the way and it is probably best to feel satisfied with each step before moving on to the next.

What we do need to do over the next chapters is to set the scene a little, and to take some time to clarify the theoretical framework into which these techniques fit. Then, with the mind somewhat satisfied, it is often easier to go beyond the mind, to relax more easily, to let go a little more thoroughly and enter into meditation.

## WHY MEDITATE?

In recent times, meditation has emerged as one of the most powerful self help tools for regaining and sustaining good health. The rapid acceptance of meditation through all levels of society parallels the integration of acupuncture into modern Western Medicine.

Why should this be so?

Until recently, these two practices, more commonly were associated with Eastern Cultures. However, when applied in the West, quite simply — they worked!

Initially, it was the effectiveness of meditation that led to its acceptance. People who practised meditation regularly felt different within themselves and they appeared different to the outside world. This was observable. It became obvious that regular meditators came to feel an inner peace, an inner calm which radiated from them.

Meditation then is a practice which, by observation, can be seen to lead to personal transformation — reliably.

More recently, scientific research has been establishing how meditation works. A whole new area of medicine, psychoneuroimmunology — or mind/body medicine — is demonstrating how our state of mind powerfully affects the way our bodies function. With these developments, the theory is catching up with the observation. We are starting to understand the physiological changes that take place in the brains and bodies of meditators.

The need for the benefits of meditation has never been greater. Amidst the busyness of modern living lie a vast array of potential stresses. Add to this the weakening effects on personal health from other lifestyle factors and environmental pollutants and we can understand



the general feeling of the need for a more relaxed, balanced, healthy and meaningful life.

When you speak with them, it seems that many people, although basically well, are feeling below par. There is a common feeling of just "coping" — like someone out at sea, just managing to keep afloat, while treading water as hard as can be. Surely there is more to life than just "coping"!

For other people, however, it is worse. Illness seems to affect far too many lives these days. While modern medicine has many excellent solutions for acute illness, many chronic illnesses by their nature, linger on.

For lasting resolution, chronic illness requires that we regain a sense of balance, a balance which includes a healthy and active immune system. In the quest for Good Health therefore, many people are seeking a way to rebuild their immune systems. They are looking for healing from within. This then is why meditation has gained such recognition. It is almost as if meditation's "calling card" has been its remarkable value as a self help, self healing technique. Quite simply, meditation — unequivocally and reliably — can transform disease into good health! And as people practise it more, equally clearly, the benefits of meditation extend far beyond "just" physical healing. For the "Good Health" we speak of will include physical, emotional, mental and spiritual good health.

This then, is the exciting prospect: Meditation can transform ordinary, everyday existence and survival into something meaningful and wonderful.

For me, meditation is an essential part of life.

To obtain maximum benefit from our meditation, and to fully integrate its benefits into our daily life, what we need is both to understand and to experience it. Let us build our understanding therefore, as a foundation upon which we can reach out for the direct experience.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING MEDITATION

### Towards a definition of meditation

So if meditation offers so much, then what is it? Understanding something of meditation's depth and breadth is useful for beginners and experienced practitioners alike. The fact is that meditation has a great deal to offer and there are many ways to practise it. Having an overview of its scope, will enable you to decide which type of meditation is likely to work best for you.

However, there is a basic problem. The problem of definition. Meditation is a word that is used by many people, in many contexts, to describe many different states. To begin with then, let us attempt to clarify the word and its meaning a little more clearly.

Classically, and still in modern dictionaries, meditation is most commonly defined to be a state of single-minded concentration. Concentration upon some particular thing. However, in popular usage the word "meditation"<sup>1</sup> has been used quite loosely. Some people use "meditation" to describe activities which may well be

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1. The popular usage of "meditation" has been expanded upon in *You Can Conquer Cancer*, pages 20–22, and in *Peace of Mind*, pages 2–8.



defined more precisely as relaxation techniques, concentration exercises, reflection, contemplation, guided imagery and so on. Some use "meditation" to describe a state of conscious awareness — a state of mind such as a state of inner peace, of silence, of union, of oneness.

What will help to clarify all this is to realise that the word meditation is used both as a noun and a verb.

Just as we differentiate between being asleep and going to sleep, we need to differentiate between being in meditation and doing meditation.

In this book, the noun "meditation" is defined as being a state of conscious awareness. The verb "to meditate", is how to get there.

Just as there is a normal waking state and a sleep state, there is this other state of consciousness called the state of meditation. Meditation is regarded as being a heightened state of conscious awareness, and like the waking and sleep states, it has varying levels and experiences to offer. If you pause for a moment and consider how many ways you can be "awake" or "asleep" — and reflect upon how many different types of experiences you can have in these states, you will begin to appreciate just how broad the word "meditation" is. What differentiates the state of meditation from the state of being awake or being asleep is the conscious awareness of being profoundly still.

Stillness in that when we are awake, we are usually busy doing something — working, feeling, thinking — doing, doing, doing. Perhaps we could more accurately be known as human doings, rather than human beings!

Meditation takes us from the doing to the being! The verb "to meditate" covers a range of techniques which help to change our state of conscious awareness — from the normal waking state to the state of meditation. When we practise meditation techniques we progressively let go of the doing and ultimately settle into a state of profound stillness — the state of meditation.

To experience this type of meditation has obvious and immediate practical benefits as well as more esoteric, inner benefits.

The key to the practical benefits of this type of meditation, is that when we enter the stillness, we relax, we let go of all activity, the doing stops, everything settles. In the stillness, the Simple Silence, we return to a state of profound balance. Quite effortlessly. Quite naturally. A profound sense of balance. As we have been discussing, this balance will reflect in a physical balance, emotional balance, mental balance and spiritual balance. The profound balance of Good Health.

The esoteric benefits of this type of meditation flow from the confidence and comfort that comes from the fact that in this state of Simple Silence we come to directly experience our own true nature. We come to know who we really are. To get past all the barriers, the doubts, even the hopes and fantasies, and to know. To experience directly what is in our heart's essence. What a comfort. What a relief. The benefit of direct experience. The union. The sense of oneness. The sense of belonging. The sense of being a part of something vast and meaningful.



## **The State of Meditation and The Process of Meditation**

Building our understanding of meditation requires this major clarification — we need to clarify the differences between the state of meditation and the process (or the techniques) of meditation.

As we have been discussing, this is an important distinction to make because the hallmark of the state of meditation is an inner stillness or silence. Therefore we need to be clear that we can only experience the state of meditation, in the way we are defining it here, when the process of meditation stops. Again, to experience the heart and essence of meditation, we need to go beyond doing, beyond technique.

Hopefully by restating this point in a number of different ways, we can get the message. Techniques certainly can be useful but really any meditation technique is best compared to a series of stepping-stones. These stepping-stones certainly can take us from one level of conscious awareness to another — for example, from a busy mind to a calm mind. However, to obtain the full benefit of meditation, to experience the depth of meditation, we need to enter the stillness, we need to take that extra leap beyond the last stepping-stone and in doing so, leave the technique behind. Only when we go beyond all technique can we enter into the non-doing of Simple Silence.

To get a sense of what all this is like, the state of meditation can be likened to the experience of being on the top of a mountain. In terms of the experience you have on the top of a mountain, it does not matter how you

made it up there. Whether you struggled, ran or flew; once you reach the top of the mountain, the same view is on offer. The view of meditation. The direct experience. The state of meditation.

Using this analogy, learning to meditate, the process of meditation, can be likened to the journey you travel as you make your way up the mountain.

Now, while a wise traveller understands that happiness is found along the way, not just at the end of the journey; when you set out to climb a mountain, there is still this sense of heading in a particular direction. Mountains are not climbed casually. It takes discipline. There needs to be a sense of clarity, purpose and resolve to make your way up a mountain.

Rather than wandering aimlessly, and especially if the mountain has some height to it, some planning, preparation, training, commitment and determination will be required to make it to the top.

To overcome that sense of wandering aimlessly, the first requirement is to have a clear sense of where you are heading. Which mountain are you intending to climb and how determined are you to make it to the top?

So, using this analogy, what are we aiming for? What is the mountain of meditation like? What is the view awaiting us at its peak, and what can we expect on the way up?

## **The Peak Experience of Meditation**

The ultimate goal in meditation is to experience our own true nature, our essence, our own good heart. Who we really are and what we are really like. This will be a



direct encounter with fundamental reality — a direct experience of Truth.

And when people recount what this is like, what do they say? Firstly — how difficult it is to put it into words. For this is a direct, fundamental experience. Immediate, personal and profound, yet inherently simple and true.

But we can still attempt to gain some idea, some feeling of what it may be like. Using another analogy, consider the sky. A clear blue summer sky. Vast, infinite, spacious, pure — with a sense of limitless possibilities. Yet, notice how some days the sky is in fact clear — blue, spacious, radiant and infinite. But the seasons come and go in their natural cycles. Some days white clouds drift gently by, other days clouds obscure the blue sky completely, and surely we have all known storms!

Curiously enough, we know that even on the cloudiest day, the stormiest day, high above the clouds it is always there — the blue sky is always there! Pure, spacious, infinite, unchanged.

Our own true nature is something like that spacious blue sky. Its intrinsic quality, its essential nature, is one of purity. A purity which is always there, always was there, always will be there — although perhaps we may lose sight of it from time to time.

What a delight it can be to travel to an airport on a stormy day. Take off in an aeroplane, rise up through the storm and the clouds. Then that exhilarating moment, breaking through above the clouds — and there it is! That spacious blue sky again! It was always there. It is just that the clouds obscured it for a while.

And there is more good news, for we know that by its nature, the sky never gets dirty, never gets stained. Even after the worst storms, we know that sooner or later the clouds will clear and there it will be again, that radiant, blue, spacious sky. A constant testimony to a basic quality; a basic fact of life. The essential nature of the sky is such that it retains its intrinsic purity. It cannot be stained. It is forever radiant!

So meditation is like hopping into an aeroplane and rising above what clouds our own life. Meditation reveals once again our own true nature, our own intrinsic purity. Rediscovering, reuniting with what in truth we were, what we are, and what we will be always.

We can translate the metaphor of the sky into a more direct impression of what our own true nature really is like. We can gain some hint of this true nature when we observe young children. At age two or three, there is a natural simplicity, an openness and an honesty, a natural enthusiasm and optimism.

We can notice too a capacity for joy and trust, combined with a touching ability to love — to both give and to receive love.

In some cultures, it is possible to observe that these qualities flow right through into adult life. Curiously, until relatively recent times, many in the West regarded these cultures as "primitive" — island or aboriginal cultures — where simplicity, joy and relationships seemed more important than money, possessions and conquests.

Surely it is no coincidence that as frustration with modern life and its busyness grows, there is a steadily increasing interest in these older cultures and what they have to offer us.



For the sad fact is that for many in modern Western society, these child-like qualities were challenged at an early age. Life events gave us the message that life was in fact a risky business. So for many there have been real experiences of physical, emotional or mental, even spiritual abuse.

The result? A need to protect ourselves. To develop patterns of behaviour, ways of doing things, ways of coping, to protect us from the hurt or damage. It is like putting barriers up. Protective barriers to screen us from the difficulties in life. And happily, to some degree, they work. Life goes on. We survive and make the best of it we can. But the cost?

While these barriers do protect us from the dangers, they also screen us from many of the good things — closeness in relationships especially. We can be screened off, cut off from close contact with both people and the environment. We tend to lose touch with real values — the worth of each human being and the sacred quality of the earth we live and walk upon.

But there is even a greater loss. These barriers also serve to screen us from the inside. We can come to lose touch with who we really are, with our own true nature.

Hence a basic, deep and fundamental lack of self-esteem and self-worth. How can you feel really good about something or someone whom you do not even know well?

So this is why meditation has so much to offer. It can re-introduce you to yourself. Your self. Your real self. Your true nature.

And this introduction is far more than being told about it, reading about it or even thinking about it.

This introduction comes as a direct experience. Immediate, real and unforgettable. It comes as a life transforming experience.

So how can we climb this mountain (of meditation), rise above the clouds, experience the view, come to know ourselves? How to re-experience our own true self and our natural state of good health?

## **The State of Meditation — How to Experience It**

Remarkably, in its essence, meditation is very simple and direct. Perhaps like most of the really worthwhile things in life. For the most profound experience of meditation is to be had in Simple Silence. When all distractions cease, when there is no doing — just being — we are left with the simple truth — a direct experience of our essence.

So the peak of the mountain, the ultimate view or experience of meditation, is to be found in Simple Silence, in stillness.

Now if we are to be still, what would we be doing? Being still, we would have to be doing nothing. If we were doing something, obviously we would miss it, this simple stillness, this Simple Silence.

So clearly, in this most profound and direct form of meditation, there can be no technique, no doing, no method. Quite simply, it is purely a matter of letting go of the busyness of life — and being still.



Now what can that be like? Well, it can be compared to coming into a room where people are moving around and talking. We know that the room, just as anywhere else, has a potential silence in it. Yet to experience that silence, what do we have to do? Clearly if we all ran around telling each other to be quiet, we could end up in endless chaotic activity. In fact, all that we do need to do, is to get clear on the intention, decide to do it and quite simply — be still.

And there it is! It was always there. Simple Silence. A direct experience.

So it is the same within each of us. There is a potential stillness, a potential inner silence that is there all the time. And all that we need to do to experience it is — be still — and there it is!

So the key to this type of profound meditation lies in its simplicity. It involves no more than letting go of activity, busyness and distraction, and entering quite simply and directly into a natural state, a natural experience of stillness that is there waiting for us all the time.

Our own inner peace and harmony.

## **Why, and What, Can Meditation Heal?**

The key to the major healing benefits of practising this simple form of meditation, is that it allows us to return to a natural state of balance.

The underlying principle is that it is normal, it is natural, for a human being to be in a state of balance.

Just as we talked of there being natural, child-like qualities of a human being in balance, so it is natural for the

physical body to be in balance. This natural physical balance is called homeostasis — the ability of the body to self-regulate, to self-balance, to adjust to changes, accidents, even illness — and return to normal — to a normal state of balance.

This is a bit like a spinning top. The natural state of a spinning top is to remain in balance. We know if we push it off balance a little, its natural state reasserts itself and it returns to that balance, or equilibrium.

So it is with our own bodies. We can eat too much, drink too much, suffer some trauma or mishap, yet given a little time, the body just naturally returns to balance. When we happen to cut ourselves, the body naturally heals itself — returns the cut to virtually normal skin. The healing of a broken bone is even more extraordinary. While it may require surgery, plaster, even bone pins or screws, given time, in almost all cases, healing will follow. The bone returns to normal shape and function. The bone is usually even a little stronger for the experience!

Surely this is a minor miracle, this capacity for the body to return itself to a state of natural balance. Yet this ability is quite simply a natural, normal function!

However, while the body is incredibly adaptable and resilient, like all things it would appear to have its limits. Just like the spinning top, if the body is pushed off balance hard enough, or far enough, that natural state of balance can be lost. When this happens we can experience a lack of balance, a lack of ease: dis-ease.

Now, when faced with the obvious symptoms of imbalance that a disease presents, we may need to seek solutions on several levels. In recent times in our society, the



attraction has been to latch onto what can be done for us, what can be done from the outside. The medicine of the "magic bullet", the quick fix, has had obvious appeal.

The aim of eliminating our symptoms, without addressing our life, has attracted many. Many people have sought to disassociate all illness from their lives. Just give me the pill, give me the op, fix it quick, don't ask me to question where the illness came from, to address my life, to review my situation, my way of being. Patch me up and get me back on the road as soon as possible.

So solutions have been sought externally: what can be done to and for a patient? Happily, a lot can in fact be done this way, using both medical and natural therapies.

But this is only half the story. Obviously this approach is limited and often enough it is only a matter of time before another symptom of "dis-ease" arises. So what of true healing, of treating the cause, not just the symptoms. And what of the potential for healing that lies within? How to contact, activate and sustain the inner healer — that inner healing power?

This is where meditation has so much to offer. It allows that natural power to reassert itself. It has been there always, it is a natural function. What meditation does is to create an inner environment which frees the natural potential for health and healing from things which may be preventing it from having its full expression.

It is like taking away the barriers and removing the shackles imposed by destructive stress, negative thinking, depletion and illness. It is a process of allowing. A freeing process that allows the natural healing potential of the

## A SUMMARY

By being still, by entering Simple Silence, we return to a profound state of inner balance.

This balance can then be integrated into daily life bringing balance in body, mind and spirit. The result? Natural and sustainable good health. Healthy body, healthy emotions and healthy mind.

Joyful spirit!



## CHAPTER 3

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# HOW TO MEDITATE

## The Choices. The Direct Approach

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Having alluded to what the state of meditation might be like, how do we get there? What process will help us to make the transition from our normal, busy, waking state into the Simple Silence of profound meditation?

### **The Process of Meditation — The First Choices**

When most people begin meditation they will benefit greatly from a teacher and a technique. But bear this in mind: the ultimate experience in meditation is to be found in Simple Silence. With that clarity, it is good to be reminded that to be silent, to be still, there is nothing you really need to do. If you were doing anything, you would not be still or silent. So ultimately in meditation there is no technique, no method, nothing "to do". There is just "being". However, not so many people can be that still so easily. For most it takes learning and practise.

Therefore, when you decide to learn meditation there are some basic choices to make. The first thing to consider is what style of teacher, what style of learning you intend to follow. Basically there are two choices.

Some teachers teach a particular method. For many, these methods are based on well tried and proven, traditional techniques. Others teach modern, innovative methods. When you go to a teacher of a particular method, it may well be presented in a clear and confident, yet possibly rigid and forceful manner. If the method is set, is rigid, you the person, may well be expected to adapt to suit the method. However, if this style of teaching works for you, then because of the confidence with which it is put forward, it can work very well. The disadvantage you may face is that if this approach does not suit, you may become frustrated as you attempt to adapt yourself to the method, or you may feel that you need to go off and try some other method.

The second style of teaching meditation is offered by teachers who teach people rather than a method. In this approach the method is adapted to suit the person. Teachers who follow this style have a range of methods and techniques at their disposal and adapt the technique to best suit the student. Obviously this approach is more flexible. While in competent hands such flexibility is highly likely to lead you to an excellent and personalized result, it may not have the initial clarity or assuredness of the former approach. It may require some experimentation and patience.

Both approaches have their good points. It can be very helpful to enter into a traditional practice that has a long and well proven history. Or you may prefer to experiment a little to find the simplest and most effective technique that works for you. You may even find a teacher who is capable of combining the best of both styles.



Personally, I have enjoyed learning meditation from teachers of both approaches. I emphasise that I understand the merit in both approaches and merely point out that this is a basic choice to make when you begin.

I would have to be classed as a teacher of people, preferring to adapt the method to the person, rather than hoping that the person will adapt to the method.

What is offered in this book is a series of exercises for you to experiment with. The sequence is the one I have found most helpful for most people. As you experiment, the recommendation is to repeat what you find helpful, discard what is not. This way you will progress smoothly towards an enjoyable, personalized and sustainable practice.

## So What Type of Meditation?

When it comes to using a method for meditating, there are many choices. This preamble has been intended to help provide a background, a context, and to clarify what we are embarking upon. You may well benefit from reading *You Can Conquer Cancer* and *Peace of Mind*. *You Can Conquer Cancer* elaborates upon specific issues to do with the prevention of illness and the management of cancer. It details meditation techniques and covers a whole range of healing and lifestyle issues. *Peace of Mind* goes into a greater depth of detail on the particular techniques of Health, Insight and Creative Meditation — all of which may well be beneficial to practise.

I believe, however, that what is presented in this book, represents the heart and essence of meditation.

The suggestion is that while simple, this style of meditation practice is the most direct and profound, and has the most to offer. Ideally, all you need to do to practise this type of meditation, is to be still. However, if like most people, you need help to let go and enter that stillness, the hope is that the detail in this book will provide you with the answers — the answers being simple and effective techniques that will help you to let go and be still.

## **Learning to Meditate**

When you need to learn how to meditate, when you need to learn how to use a technique, be reminded of the basic principles. Most importantly, as we proceed along the path that leads from a busy mind into the silence of profound meditation, at any point, at any moment, there is always the possibility that we will be ready to let go and be still. Remember that any technique is like a stepping-stone. Any technique that we employ helps us to move from stepping-stone to stepping-stone. All that we do, every step we take, every technique we benefit from, is a further preparation for the decisive, final step of letting go and entering Simple Silence. And it could happen at any moment.

However, to let go and be still you will need to have the confidence, to feel comfortable enough within yourself, to let go of everything you normally “do”, including your defensive, protective mechanisms, as well as the things you enjoy on the surface. Now, when we are so used to “doing” all the time, this letting go is bound to feel different. Perhaps even a little scary. For when we let go deeply, our mind settles and becomes still. If our



mind is still, if our mind is not busy doing, doing; who is in control? From the mind's point of view then, letting go can feel like letting go of control.

No wonder it takes the "right" environment before you can allow yourself to be open to what in reality is a very simple, safe and secure process — simply being still. Once you do experience this stillness you will find it deeply comforting, deeply satisfying; a source of deep contentment.

Now, if you do need help with the process of meditation, there are three areas that will be helpful to consider:

1. Preparing for meditation
2. Learning an appropriate meditation technique
3. Entering the silence — The direct approach

Firstly then, let us clarify the principles behind these three areas before we begin to experiment with the exercises. Then you will be able to apply the principles in the practical context of your own life and situation. This will help you to end up with something that is personally satisfying and works!

## **THE PROCESS OF MEDITATION**

### **1. Preparing for meditation**

As we gain some appreciation of the basic principles, perhaps it will come as no surprise to learn that classically it has often been said that when the "right" conditions are created, meditation will arise spontaneously. There is a compelling logic in this! To meditate deeply is to let go of the busyness of life, to relax completely and to enter into a state of non-doing. All that we need to do

is to be still. So what will help us to feel comfortable enough to simply let go and be still? Being in a conducive environment is a good start. This is why our preparation is so important. By creating a conducive environment, creating the "right" conditions, we will have the foundation upon which effective meditation is built.

Therefore it is well worthwhile to take the time to develop the possibilities. To be most useful, this preparation does warrant some forethought, planning and practise. Then the environment you create for your meditation sessions will help you to let go and enter the stillness almost effortlessly, almost like a natural consequence or flow on from the preparation itself.

Briefly, to prepare for effective meditation, you will need to attend to your "outer" environment and your "inner" environment. The outer environment deals with the environment you create around you, the environment in which you practise your meditation. Your inner environment is to do with the attitude and state of mind with which you approach and enter into the practice of meditation. Soon we shall investigate these outer and the inner environments in some detail.

However, to add to the framework of understanding we are building, it is helpful to state again that having created a conducive environment, you may find that you can simply let go and enter directly into the stillness of meditation. It could be that simple and direct!

However, if you need more help it can be useful to understand that the process of learning to meditate can be divided into the two steps we shall consider next:



## **2. Learning An Effective Meditation Technique**

Step 1: The Relaxation Response

Step 2: The Specific Meditation Techniques

### **— Step One: The Relaxation Response**

The Relaxation Response involves relaxing physically and calming the mind. It is easy to do, and reliable in its effects. This is a major technique for relaxing effortlessly, relieving stress and regaining a basic, yet profound state of inner balance.

To practise the Relaxation Response is to enter a state of deep rest. A rest that includes the body and the mind — profoundly. A rest that goes a long way to restoring the natural balance we have talked of so much. Clearly then, practising the Relaxation Response can be very regenerative. In fact, over 500 scientific articles published in major medical and scientific journals around the world attest to the benefits of the Relaxation Response and deeper meditation.

Another of the major benefits that the Relaxation Response has to offer is that it provides us with another opportunity to enter directly into the stillness. Being well prepared, being supported by a conducive environment, it may well be possible to simply flow on from the Relaxation Response, to let go still more, and enter Simple Silence.

When it comes to learning to meditate, however, there is still more to consider. Since the Relaxation Response is a reliable technique for relaxing physically and calming the mind, it also provides an ideal starting point from which to begin the practice of specific meditation techniques.

## — Step Two: The Specific Meditation Techniques — 3 Major Pathways

When we consider the processes, or the techniques of meditation, it is a bit like saying that there are different ways to get to the top of the mountain. In fact there are three major pathways to consider — three broad, yet useful classifications — Health Meditation, Insight Meditation and Creative Meditation. We will summarize them in turn.

### *Health Meditation — Simple Silence*

Health Meditation is really a continuation of the Relaxation Response. It flows on naturally from a relaxed body and a calm mind. One simply lets go more and progresses into a more profoundly relaxed body and an even quieter mind. Effortlessly, deeply, completely. Resting then in deep natural peace. In a state of profound inner balance. In a state of Simple Silence.

This is the type of meditation we have been focussing upon so far. Simple Silence. As one practises this technique, that sense of inner balance flows into outer life. The experience of inner balance reliably relieves stress, teaches you to relax deeply and translates into the balanced states we call physical health, emotional health, mental health and spiritual health.

No wonder that for many meditators, this type of practice is quite sufficient and complete in itself. It provides a reliable technique that can take you from a tense body and busy mind, through a state of deep relaxation, into a profound experience of Simple Silence. Quite effortlessly, yet effectively. This is meditation, pure and simple. This is the focus of the exercises that are coming up in this book.



### *Insight Meditation*

Whereas Health Meditation involves stilling the mind (in a relaxed body), Insight Meditation involves concentrating the mind upon a single issue (in a relaxed body).

This is a technique in which the mind is actively employed. It is a process that is used to reflect upon particular issues. First analysing, then contemplating, aiming to develop Insight and to gain Wisdom.

So while Insight Meditation is a different type of exercise to Health meditation, and it has different initial aims and techniques, this is another practice which is particularly useful to develop.

With the gaining of Insight comes a deeper understanding, a greater confidence and a more sustainable level of ease.

Most importantly, out of all this flows a certainty about goals, and what to do in life. This translates into a clarity of purpose, the ability to make good choices in life and the commitment and discipline that is needed to follow these choices through.

### *Creative Meditation*

This is an even more active process for the mind. It is the domain of "The Power of the Mind". It involves understanding how the mind works — and then using it in a smart and effective fashion!

Basically Creative Meditation is about using the mind to achieve goals. This the mind can do very well. In fact, the tricky part, the important part, is to be clear and confident about what your goals really are, really need to be.

While the intellect is important in goal setting, as explained above, Insight Meditation is a very valuable technique for developing that inner knowing that brings a profound confidence to goal setting and as a result makes commitment and discipline easy.

The techniques that we need to learn to use Creative Meditation effectively, are Affirmations and Imagery. Basically these are both techniques for conditioning the subconscious to work for us in creating the things we want.

We can use the techniques in five main areas.

- (a) As a way of gaining inner peace.

By imagining in your mind a favourite place in nature, as if you are really there; by association, you will feel relaxed and at peace. This effect of "association", is the basis of many of the relaxing imagery exercises around today.

- (b) To program ourselves for excellence.

By practising in your head, in meditation, you can practise "perfectly" and so condition your body to do what you have chosen for it.

"Inner Rehearsal" is a good descriptive term for this process of practising in your head. This is the basis of much sports psychology, a means to sell more fridges, and the techniques that could improve your public speaking or help you to overcome phobias.

- (c) To change automatic and/or subconscious behaviour.

Why is it that New Years' resolutions most commonly do not work?



Because the things we choose to change are often old habits, the program for which is deeply encoded in our subconscious. Just deciding intellectually to change, often enough has little, if any, impact on that subconscious conditioning.

Yet with Affirmations and Imagery, we have reliable access to the subconscious and so these techniques can be major tools for personal change, personal transformation.

(d) In the specific case of mind/body medicine.

Imagery provides another powerful way of using your mind to positively affect your health. We have spoken in detail already of how stilling the mind can help your health. In the balance that comes with the stillness, the body is free to use its natural energies to heal itself.

Yet the mind is clearly very useful when active too. When we learn how to direct the mind positively it becomes possible to direct healing to a particular area of need, and indeed, of speeding up that process of healing.

(e) Invoking energy or qualities.

If you think for a moment of something that made you really angry in the past, my guess is that soon you will be feeling angry. Conversely, dwell on some happy highlight of your life and soon you will be feeling good.

In this way, you can bring to mind, invoke the image of various states of mind, and gain their benefits. In some cultures, these possibilities are used extensively. Shamans, Witchdoctors, many tradi-

tional healers have a powerful working knowledge of such possibilities! Clearly the possibilities can be constructive or destructive. With knowledge and training they can be used powerfully and wisely.

Obviously these five areas cover exciting possibilities. As with Insight Meditation, Creative Meditation can be very valuable and worth learning and practising. These techniques are presented in detail in *Peace of Mind*. Again, this particular book aims to go to the heart of the matter and detail how to experience the true essence of meditation.

### 3. Entering The Silence — The Direct Approach

Having built up something of a framework of understanding, having covered some of the range of possibilities with meditation, let us now return to the practicalities and the essence. If the essence of meditation is about being still, clearly any technique can only be partially helpful. Obviously if we are practising a technique, we are doing something. Obviously, when we are doing something, we are not being still, so to enter the stillness of meditation, the silence, we need to let go of any technique. We need to go "beyond" the technique. The technique, any technique, can best be regarded as a stepping-stone. It may well help us to make the transition from an active mind to calm mind. The technique may well be helpful in its own right. It may help to relax us, to calm us; it may lead to clarity, inspiration, insight — many benefits. However, to progress from calm mind to still mind, we need to take that extra step. To step beyond the technique itself, and to be still.



So as we consider the practicalities of being still, remember that it is always that simple. At any moment, you could reach that point where you simply let go, be still and enter Simple Silence.

To enter Simple Silence, there is, therefore a simple rule:

**The best meditation technique,  
is the simplest one that works!**

With the practical details that make up the rest of this book, with the techniques that follow, I hope you will find a method that you can begin with, apply, simplify and use to effectively do what (when you say it quickly) sounds so easy — to be still!

What follows is intending to provide the details, the mechanics of how to be still.

Let us begin with the preparation.





## CHAPTER 4

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# PREPARING TO MEDITATE

## Creating a Conducive Environment

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The environment in which we prepare to practise meditation can lead us directly into the state of meditation. We need to consider what will help us both externally and internally.

### THE OUTER ENVIRONMENT

When beginning, most people do find it easier to be in a quiet and peaceful environment. However, in most homes, most families, if we were to say that you could only meditate when all was still and quiet around you then probably not much useful meditation would be done. Particularly in most suburban environments there will be your own family, the neighbours and the passing traffic, not to mention the telephone, door bell and other casual demands.

The key to how you manage all this is to remember to be relaxed about it all. So start in the best location available, avoid those distractions that you can, accept what is unavoidable and make the most of what you have.

## **The Aim:**

To utilize the best possible physical location that in the context of your own life circumstances, is most conducive to relaxing, letting go and resting in deep natural peace.

## **The Principles:**

1. Establish a "Special Place".
2. Minimize the distractions.
3. Accept what is unavoidable.
4. Make the most of what you have.

## **Applying the Principles:**

### **1. Establishing a "Special Place"**

Having a particular place where you can practise your meditation regularly is a great help. You may be fortunate enough to have a whole room you can set aside; perhaps a corner of a room or even just a particular chair, cushion or space on the floor.

Ideally, particularly when you are beginning, going to the same place each time will help establish that place as the "special place" where meditation occurs. After a while, just going to that place will have such a strong association, that you will be well on the way just by taking up your usual position.



## 2. Minimizing the Distractions

Again, consider your surroundings and choose the place in which you are most likely to feel at ease, to remain undisturbed and to feel you can give your full attention to your meditation.

Decide in advance how to handle potential distractions such as the telephone, front door-bell and family requests or demands! Here the choices are:

- (a) To isolate yourself
- (b) Be prepared to respond to interruptions and leave your meditation;
- (c) Be prepared to respond to major interruptions only with the option of seeing those interruptions almost as a part of the meditation, and once the interruption is concluded, return to your formal meditation practice.

Either choice can work as long as you make that choice consciously, avoid recriminations and feel at ease with your choice. In other words, avoid allowing yourself to become frustrated and instead, be comfortable with how you decide to deal with these basic issues.

In a practical sense then, with the telephone, you may choose not to answer it, to take it off the hook, to cover it with a pillow, to get an answering machine or to ask someone else to take messages for you. What will you feel most comfortable with? What will work best for all concerned?

With visitors, some people tell their friends what time they meditate each day and request that space

be kept free. Others have family attend to visitors' needs. Some use creative signs on their front doors — one of the more delightful:

*Do not Disturb  
In an Altered State!*

The issues raised by family or shared accommodation will vary depending upon who you share your space with. Most members of the household are likely to be happy to make an effort to minimize distractions when you are meditating. Again, there are choices here in what you may want to ask for and what will work best anyway.

You could decide that just being in a separate room is enough and you will leave the others free to go about their day as usual. You may need to request some special consideration such as adjusting the volume of TV or music that is playing. Obviously the possibility of direct interruption needs to be resolved in advance and preferably agreed to by all so that you can feel comfortable and confident with what to expect.

Young children do pose particular needs and here there is another range of options. You may like to keep your meditation times flexible to match sleep times. One parent may take child care, the other meditate and then swap. You may prefer to just meditate anyway and allow the child to experience what you are doing. They will probably attempt to distract you and regain your attention, but if you are determined to not be distracted and demonstrate that this is a time for you to be left, this latter approach can work well. If your children are born



with you meditating already, it becomes a part of the routine of their life and so is natural and easy. In fairness, while this works for some, and for some older children too, it does not work for everyone!

The key again — create the best physical environment that you can feel relaxed in, taking into account the needs of those around you as well as your own.

### **3. Accepting what is unavoidable**

Obviously to accept what is unavoidable is “good advice”! But, how to do it? The answer may be similar to much of what we have been discussing in connection with the process of meditation. You can expect to go through stages as your practice continues and you will find that things get easier and more effective as time goes on.

There is no doubt that to begin your meditation practice, it may well be worthwhile to go to a special program, perhaps in a special place. Perhaps you do feel confident to begin in your own home; many do. However, if you feel fragile or find yourself easily distracted, you may find it works better to enrol in a course that helps you get started. Obviously this is something we do through our Foundation for people who can get to us at Yarra Junction, and I do travel to conduct meditation workshops in other places. We may be able to refer you to people we know in your area or you may need to seek out your own possibilities. Often people do find tapes helpful to overcome distractions and focus their attention more directly on the process, so two tapes have been prepared specifically to compliment this

book and help establish the practices we are considering. These practice tapes present the key exercises and techniques and are available through stores or via the order form in the back of the book.

Remember, the aim in meditation is to experience more than just good practice sessions! The real aim is for the benefits of the formal practice to flow into your daily life. Ideally this means that the inner sense of relaxation, peace and contentment is with you independently of your external condition. In other words you can feel centered, clear and basically comfortable whether you are surrounded by ease and comfort, or by chaos!

In the early days of your practice, it is highly likely that you will find this inner peace easier to experience amidst this peaceful outer environment we have been discussing. However, even in the early days, some things are bound to happen that have the potential to disturb your surroundings. Your own family, the neighbours, an ambulance passing by — all normal but potentially disturbing events.

Do be clear then that these are normal events. You may well be able to register them, acknowledge them for what they are — the family, the neighbours, an ambulance passing by — and let them go. Keep your focus, your attention on your practise, and merely allow these things to pass on by.

As time goes on, many meditators actually seek out more challenging, more potentially disturbing environments, so that they can practise entering into and maintaining their inner peace and silence, independently of the outer distractions. This is a very



helpful and important step in integrating the practise of meditation into daily life which we will discuss in more detail later.

#### **4. Making the most of what you have**

There are many things you might choose to do to enhance the quality of the basic space you have available for your meditation practise. What do you have available, or what could you obtain easily that you could include in your place of meditation, that would add to it's "specialness"? What would make it more effective as a place where you can relax, let go and rest in Simple Silence?

Here are some possibilities to consider. You may well come up with other even more effective ones!

(a) Personal Comfort — Your choice could range from spartan to luxurious.

- The overall "ambience" of the space. Perhaps you repaint your room a particular colour, add a floor rug, have particular posters or paintings on the wall.
- The view: some actually may prefer a non-distracting brick wall, but most will find a garden view more conducive than the free-way.
- The particular chair, cushion, or mat you use needs to support the posture that you use during your practise. Ideally keep what you do use to sit or lie on for meditation only, so that again the association with sitting or lying on it prepares you for your meditation.

- Blanket. Many people like to wrap a blanket around themselves or lie upon a particular rug. Mohair is soft and warm and excellent for this.
- (b) Company — solitary or with others?
- Other people: There is no doubt that meditation is cumulative and the degree of benefit you gain from meditating with others will depend upon how many they are and what the quality of their meditation is. I strongly recommend that whenever the opportunity does present, do meditate with experienced people, or with groups. Often individuals or groups can have a powerful effect in creating almost like a "meditative field" into which you can enter and experience a deeper level of meditation.

Attending a regular group is strongly recommended whenever you can find one that matches your needs.

At home, if you can meditate regularly with a partner or another member of your household, it is a real blessing from which you are both bound to benefit. If this is not easy, perhaps you have friends who you can get together with on a regular basis to share some practise. The Buddhists have a lovely expression for this — Noble Company. Spending time in Noble Company is well worthwhile anytime. To meditate together is a treat! Perhaps too it allows for



Noble Conversation — discussing issues of a finer nature.

- Animals. Yes or No? Some people find a cat or dog adds to their practise, others find them real distractions. Almost always the animals love to be around when meditation is happening so you may need to actively exclude them if that is your choice.
- Tapes. Obviously tapes can serve to focus your attention and guide you, However, tapes can serve another purpose — they can link you to your teacher. Most people find tapes particularly helpful when they are starting out, or if they have a flat spot in their meditation and need help to maintain their discipline and practise.
- Presence. Like tapes, photos or mementos of significant people can add to the atmosphere of your place of meditation.

(c) Spiritual Influences — Abstract or specific?

- Candles. Some people find that lighting a candle adds a useful symbolic dimension such as the flame representing the light within. Also, lighting a candle at the start of the session can make for a nice transition from other more mundane activities and can be helpful in marking the start of formal meditation practice.
- Religious statues, paintings, icons or other symbolic objects may all be helpful according to your traditions and beliefs.

(d) The Four Elements — a representative of each element can be another addition to your special place.

- Earth: a favourite rock, perhaps itself from a special place
- Fire: a candle
- Air: perhaps represented by a feather
- Water: sometimes a shell, perhaps with water in it as well.

(e) The Five Senses — Again, what helps?

- Visual: What inspires you? What reminds you of your practise? What leads you into meditation? Use natural or simple lighting wherever possible.
- Sound: Is it possible for your external environment to be silent and reflect your inner direction? Most probably not in fact, so what helps? Music can help to overlay distracting noise and lead towards relaxation, but do not allow music to become a distraction in itself. The need is to move beyond all this into inner silence. So most people simplify the noises as much as possible — avoid what they can and accept what they cannot!
- Smell: Incense, perfume, flowers — all worth considering and experimenting with.



- Taste: almost certainly it is best to clean your teeth and meditate with a fresh mouth.
- Sensations: preferably have clean, soft and loose clothing. Remember the importance of the fabrics you sit or lie upon and use natural materials wherever possible.

Some people feel warmer as they meditate, some cooler. As your experience develops, work out what clothing to wear and whether you need a blanket or heating.

## **In Summary**

The important thing is to get started. Be happy to experiment and, as with all these exercises, discard what is unhelpful and keep what works. Pretty obvious really!

What follows regarding your inner environment is a little subtler but still very important and equally practical when it comes to preparing a conducive environment in which meditation is made easier.

## **THE INNER ENVIRONMENT**

Hopefully by now you are beginning to get some idea, some feeling for this approach of simply letting go and letting be. However, while in theory, in essence, this is very easy, there is the ongoing question of what will help us to do it. So again, the book is attempting to help you in the practise — how to progress from day to day activity into this inner state of Simple Silence.

While the outer environment is helpful, the inner approach is even more important. Having struggled for many years to find out what does work best for most people, and then struggled to find a way to explain what to do as new meditators attempt to let go and practise “doing nothing”, I trust you find this section of some considerable use.

## **The Aim**

To adopt a state of mind which allows you to let go of the busyness of life and opens you to the possibility of entering into the natural ease of meditation.

## **The Principles**

1. Bring the mind home
2. Relax and let go

## **Applying the Principles**

### **1. Bringing the Mind Home**

In day to day life our minds are mostly focussed outwards. We are distracted. We are preoccupied with what has happened in the past and what the future might hold. Often enough, what is happening in the current moment only receives fleeting attention. It is as if we are living out of time — more in the past or the future than in this very moment.

For so many it seems that our thoughts, and the actions that go with them, are primarily concerned with grasping — getting, holding, hanging on to; or



aversion — attempting to avoid something from happening. With all this comes a struggling and a striving, a basic, deep seated inner tension, an unhappiness, a basic core level of suffering.

Meditation brings the mind home. From being focussed outwards in daily life, in meditation we turn our attention inwards. When we do this, the first thing that we notice is just exactly what is happening in this very moment. We notice our level of tension or relaxation. We notice our thoughts, our fears, our hopes, our desires.

So if we have been living out of time, or if we have been engrossed in the busyness of life — when we do pause and bring the mind home, at first we may seem even a little more agitated. This is purely because we have become more aware — now we are noticing what is really going on! However, as we relax and let go, all this falls away. It simply settles. Like the traditional image of the glass of muddy water.

As we think, struggle and strive, it is like continuing to stir a glass full of muddy water. All you get is more muddy water. Meditation then is like putting the glass aside, ceasing the agitation, and allowing the natural process of settling to occur. The mud simply falls away and we are left with clear water! In fact what we are left with is what remains after all the outer activity ceases. We are left with what is in our innermost core. We are left with the experience of who we really are. We come to experience our own true nature.

So this process, this bringing the mind home; it too involves stages. Yet it has a fundamental simplicity based upon shifting the focus of our conscious attention — shifting our attention from an outward, to an inward looking.

If this still does sound a little abstract, come back to these words after you have practised the meditation exercises a few times and they will probably make better sense. It is really the experience of it all that is most important. The words are aimed at introducing you to what you are looking for, so that as you practise, you will recognize what is happening.

What you may well notice as you begin to meditate, is a deep abiding calm, a sense of ease and an extraordinary feeling of spaciousness. It is as if you have more capacity to absorb the ups and downs, the joys and the traumas of life, and having absorbed them, to integrate them in a meaningful way.

It seems as if there is even a fundamental humour that starts to flow through all this. A compassionate, understanding type of humour that acknowledges the pain and the suffering that seems to occur often enough; but a humour that has the capacity to see beyond all that. A humour that can celebrate the human spirit, that can recognise its intrinsic purity even while it notices the day to day problems.

This all leads on to a deeply contented smile. A smile that has its basis in inner peace. And this all leads to a sense of understanding and compassion and to the natural expression of loving kindness.

For this is our natural state.

This is what it can be when the mind returns home.



## 2. Relaxing the Mind and Letting Go

In the context of this style of meditation, this means to relax the body and the mind. To do this we let go of any effort to do anything, any effort to think of anything in particular. We let go and rest in a state of deep natural peace. And balance. We rest in a state of pure awareness. In Simple Silence.

In practise this means that first you learn how to relax thoroughly. Then you allow any thoughts that come in to your awareness, simply to come when they are ready, and to go when they are ready. No effort, no struggle. No wanting a particular thought to come, no attempting to push a particular thought away, no grasping, no aversion. Simply allowing the thoughts to settle. Just like the mud in the glass. Just letting go and allowing them to settle. As you let go of the doing, you become aware of the natural state of being.

My hope is that you will find the real gift of this book is that the exercises it details will indeed help you to let go profoundly and enter into the stillness.

However, before we embark upon those exercises, it remains worthwhile to take the time to put what we have covered so far into practise and to prepare the body and mind still further through the use of the Relaxation Response.





## CHAPTER 5

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# THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

## Relaxing Physically, Calming the Mind

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Once we have sorted out our outer environment and our inner environment (or attitude), we are ready to proceed with the technique that is the first step in bringing it all together. We are ready to practise the Relaxation Response.

### The Aim

To relax the body and calm the mind.

### The Principles

We can learn a simple, methodical technique that reliably relaxes the body and calms the mind. In the right position, with the right attitude, we can let go of physical tension and mental concerns and settle into a state of deep natural rest.

In this restful state, our body chemistry returns to a natural state of balance. This practise is like entering into a profound rest which is both deeply regenerative and invigorating. At the same time, in this balanced state,

the body is free to attend to any inner repair work and so healing flows naturally and powerfully.

The Relaxation Response therefore, clearly offers a lot in its own right. It is an ideal stress management tool, assists in the prevention and the management of illness and leads to greater clarity and efficiency as well as a heightened sense of calm and wellbeing.

Another of the major benefits of the Relaxation Response is that it does provide a reliable method when one is needed. From this starting point, this first step, we can learn how to simplify this method, to advance and let go of the method itself. The Relaxation Response provides an ideal springboard from which to advance into the practise of specific meditation techniques.

Another reminder that Insight Meditation and Creative Meditation techniques have great value in their own right, but in this book we are focussing on going to the heart of meditation practice. Here the focus will be on the process that most directly helps us to enter into Simple Silence.

## **Applying the Principles of The Relaxation Response**

### **1. The Position**

Classically, position was regarded as one of the most important parts of the preparation for meditation. In Zen and in Tibet, it is said that when you sit correctly, meditation spontaneously arises. However, in our Western culture, many new meditators are hampered by their body's ability to bend! The classical meditation



postures mostly involve sitting cross-legged on the floor. Often the full lotus posture is recommended. For many this is virtually an impossible position to get into, and even if they could somehow manage it, the resultant pain may well be so distracting that effective meditation would be virtually impossible.

So what to do? Again, use the principles and apply them in the context of your own possibilities. Start where you can, perhaps as time goes on you experiment, learn to flex a little more and take up more advanced positions. While the traditional postures certainly do have their own benefits, in my experience accumulated over many years, most Western people can enter into quite satisfying meditation while using simpler and less demanding positions. Be reminded that the primary principle is the ease of it all. There is no benefit in getting stressed while you attempt to get yourself unstressed! So, use the principles and be happy with what you can do.

The principles of a good meditation position are that it should be symmetrical, a little uncomfortable and inspiring.

- (a) Symmetrical: The practise aims to help us to experience a state of balance, therefore when the position reflects this balance we are half-way there.
- (b) A little uncomfortable. The discomfort we need is a relative thing. The principle is that you will benefit from mild discomfort in that it will keep you awake, help you to concentrate and make sure that you do make a conscious effort to relax past the discomfort.

This technique we will be using would be great for putting you to sleep if you wanted it to; however, the mild discomfort helps to move you into the

Relaxation Response instead. It is a matter of finding a position that is a little uncomfortable but within your manageable limits.

- (c) Inspiring. The position, backed by the way you take it up, needs to have an inspiring quality about it. An ideal is to sit like a mountain. A mountain is solid, deeply at rest, yet majestic and inspiring. A noble contrast to just flopping down any old how and hoping for the best. Your position and how you approach it can set the tone for the whole practise.

Putting all this together, most people sit in a fairly straight chair or do sit cross-legged on the floor.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, you can lie down upon your back — best on a mat or rug on the floor rather than in the place of sleep, the bed. Lying down can be good if relaxation or healing is a specific need. However, if your intention is a deeper experience, sitting is likely to be more helpful.

## 2. The Attitude

This we have discussed at some length already, but to be more specific and practical what is it really like?

The best analogy I can offer is that it is like going to a good film in a picture theatre. Having decided to go, first you choose which film you would like to see. Let us imagine that you choose a pleasant film, perhaps with a little meaning. Nothing scary you need to be on guard about — something pleasant, perhaps a little humorous too. You make time for it and go to the appropriate

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1. On pp. 50–51 of *Peace of Mind* there are a series of photographs demonstrating a range of positions suitable for meditation.



place, in this case the picture theatre! You pay your money, purchase your ticket and enter. Having done that, barring catastrophes, you know you will stay for the whole show and nothing going on in the outside world will disturb or distract you. Then you relax. Ahh — nothing to do really! Just sit back and see what happens. No need to direct, to act, to comment. No need to do anything, just observe. Quite passive really. You would not want to go to sleep and miss the show, so you remain alert but relaxed, at ease. You are interested in it all, so receptive. Like an observer. Preferably an impartial observer.

So these are the keys. Passive, Alert, Receptive — PAR — the keys to the right attitude for meditation.

Another way of putting this is simply to be curious. Just be curious. Interested to notice what happens. Approach each of your meditation sessions like fresh experiments, with an open mind, letting go of particular hopes or expectations, with a curiosity to notice what happens. With this attitude, something worthwhile almost certainly will eventuate!

### **3. Relaxing the Body**

The importance of consciously relaxing the body as a prelude to meditation needs constant reinforcement. For beginners, let me emphasize that in my own meditation practise and in my work with thousands of other beginners it just becomes clearer and clearer that the physical really does need attending to.

For those of you who have been meditating for some time, whatever style or approach you use, may I suggest you give continued attention to this aspect of the prac-

tise. Do not be tempted into feeling that it is old hat or "beginners stuff"! As the years go by my experience leads me to give it more and more attention and to delight in learning new ways to present and apply the basic principle.

The principle is that the body is intimately connected with all aspects of our being — emotions, mind and spirit. Modern research led by such wonderful scientists as Candace Pert, is demonstrating the exquisitely intricate, delicate and wonderful degree of communication between spirit, mind, emotions & body. The study of this field, now termed psychoneuroimmunology — some call it Mind/Body medicine for ease — is a rapidly emerging and fascinating science. It is validating and defining the mind/body connection, proving what the old masters maintained — that all is interdependent.

In practical terms, the relevance of all this is that the more you relax your body, the more there is a flow-on effect that relaxes your mind. While often it is difficult to tell your mind to relax and be still, especially if it is agitated to begin with; it is fairly easy to learn how to tell your body to relax and be still. The more thoroughly you do this, then the more the relaxation you feel in your body will flow almost automatically to relax your mind and on, further on towards that deeper stillness.

Relaxing the body therefore, is a key step. Do give this physical relaxation the attention it warrants. For many people in fact, attending to this step thoroughly leads them directly into relaxation and even profound meditation. It provides another opportunity to let go and be still.



In *Peace of Mind* this technique is presented in detail over pages 13 to 86. It would make sense to read or reread that section again. What follows are the essential points, in enough detail for beginners and with extra insights gained in the intervening years since *Peace of Mind* was written in 1987.

What seems to work most reliably for most people is to begin with the traditional relaxation technique called the Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise — or PMR for ease. This gives you a methodical way of consciously relaxing your body. Beginning with the feet, you work up through each muscle group of the body, contracting and relaxing the muscles. What the exercise does is to focus your attention on each major muscle group in the body. By contracting the muscles you highlight the feeling of tension in that area. Then relaxing the muscles, you have an exaggerated feeling of relaxation in that area. The result is that the muscles are able to let go and become more deeply relaxed than they were to begin with. The effective result is a consciously relaxed body.

With each muscle group then, what is required is to give your full attention to each of the following four feelings:

- (a) The feeling of the muscles at rest — what the muscles feel like when you first give them your attention.
- (b) The feeling when the muscles are contracting — what the feeling of tension is like.
- (c) The feeling of the muscles as they are relaxing — the feeling of letting go, the Relaxation Response.
- (d) The feeling of the muscles when they are deeply relaxed.

## (a) The Feeling of the Muscles at Rest

What do the muscles feel like when you first give them your attention? For example, we start with the feet. Now while you have been reading the section above, for all intents and purposes it is most likely that you will have had very little awareness of your feet. Unless you have an injury or a pain, it was probably as if they were not there. We know that they were (or one of them at least in my case!) but we have no awareness of them. So when you take up your meditation position and focus your attention on your feet, what do you notice? What sensations are you aware of? Probably you notice their temperature — warm, cool — perhaps neutral. Perhaps it helps to move your toes a little. What sensations do you notice coming from the contact with your shoes, stockings or socks? Perhaps there are areas in the toes or soles that feel different to the heels.

The strong recommendation is to let go of any judgement of what you do notice. There is no right or wrong, good or bad in all this. Even if you do have some discomfort or pain in an area, let go of the natural tendency to view it badly, to judge it as a bad thing, to want it to change for the better. Give your energy in this exercise merely to noticing what the sensations are really like, right now. In the present moment. Aim to let go of dwelling on how it happened, what may or may not have caused the problem. Aim to let go of what may or may not happen, what it may be like in the future. Aim to observe what it is like right now, at this particular



time, in this particular moment.

Your aim is to be a fully conscious and aware impartial observer as you focus all your attention on the sensations that arise as you contract and relax your muscles.

(b) **The Feeling of Contracting the Muscles**

What does it feel like when you contract the muscles? For this is the feeling of tension. It is bound to feel different to what the muscles first felt like, so how does it feel?

Before proceeding to practise the PMR, however, for some people there is another preliminary step — the need to work out how to contract all these different muscles! Please take time to do this. This exercise has tremendous value. Basically the aim for each muscle group is that when you contract the muscles you make that area tight, rigid — tense. Experiment for yourself and work out how to do it.

## **THE MUSCLE CONTRACTING EXERCISE**

**Feet** Pull the toes back towards the heels while resisting the movement at the same time. This braces all the muscles, making all the muscles in the feet tight and tense. Note the sensations this produces and then let them go.

**Calves** Like you were in soft sand, pushing your toes deeper into it, at the same time bracing the muscles at the front of the calves. You may notice some mus-

cles in the feet or thighs get into the act a little too, just focus all your attention on what sensations are produced in the calves. As you proceed, give the same focussed attention to each muscle group.

**Thighs** As if you were lifting the legs up, but holding them down at the same time.

**Buttocks** Contract the big muscles of the back-side to lift yourself up a little.

**Tummy** As if you were lying on your back and someone was to drop a medicine ball on your tummy. This instinctively contracts the muscles of the tummy and lower back.

**Chest** Brace the chest like a barrel.

**Arms** Make them rigid. From the shoulders down to the hands — so that if someone were to try to move them, they would remain where they were.

**Shoulders** Lift your shoulders up, chin down.

**Jaw** Close your teeth firmly.

**Eyes** Close your eyes firmly.

**Forehead** Frown a little and then lift your eyebrows up as well.

Once you can make all these muscle groups contract upon command, you are ready to use the full exercise. Remember that the aim as you contract the



muscles is to notice the feeling created by that imposed tension and to notice how different that tension feels compared with when the muscles were at rest.

(c) The Feeling of the Muscles Relaxing

As you relax the muscles you let the imposed tension go. Let the tension go over a few seconds so that you can appreciate the feeling of the muscles actually relaxing. This is another very important sensation to become familiar with as it is the feeling of letting go, the feeling of the Relaxation Response itself. In other words the relaxation phase needs to take long enough for you to be able to feel it as a distinct phase.

As you practise this step more, it also will enable you to learn how to be able to let go at will. This will help you during the day, whenever you become stressed or a little "uptight". (Notice the words we use!) You will recognise the feeling of tension and be able to let it go by remembering and triggering the feeling of letting go, the feeling of relaxation. This is another valuable benefit that flows on from practising this basic technique, and we will learn how to do it shortly.

(d) The Feeling of the Muscles when they are deeply relaxed

Once you let the muscles go in this conscious and deliberate way you will notice that they do in fact come to feel more relaxed.

You can prove this for yourself, with a simple exercise which also helps to get used to this whole technique.

## The Preliminary PMR Exercise

1. Stand up with enough space around you to be comfortable.
2. You can start this exercise with your eyes open, however, you will probably benefit from shutting them so you can concentrate on the feelings more directly.
3. With your arms hanging by your sides, notice now what sensations are in your hands. You may not notice all that much. Perhaps they feel warm or cool. If you move the fingers a little you probably will feel a little more.
4. Now make a tight fist and notice the different sensations produced in your hands. They're bound to feel tight, compressed, tense.
5. Now gradually, over a few seconds, relax your hands and allow the fingers to uncurl, gradually stretching them right out. Notice the feelings associated with the fingers relaxing in this way.
6. Then shake the hands and fingers loosely — from the wrist only. Let them flop about like a rag doll, letting go of any tension, relaxing them thoroughly.
7. Now let your hands and fingers hang loose by your sides again. How do they feel now? Can you notice any difference compared with when you began? Perhaps they feel a little warmer, sometimes there can even be a tingling coming into them as you do this.
8. Repeat this whole procedure with the hands, making a fist and relaxing the muscles. Focus on the



feelings that go with each part of the exercise and repeat it until you have a good feel for it.

9. Next, as well as making a fist, at the same time brace all the muscles in the arms right up to the shoulders. Notice where the tension is most obvious. Is it in the hands somewhere or which part of the arms?

Be aware that there is no right or wrong in any of this. The exercise is to let go of any attempts to analyze all this or make any judgements about what happens. The exercise is about going beyond that sort of rational, analytical thinking, and focussing on impartially observing the feelings as you contract and relax the muscles. As an important aside, be aware that while you are practising the PMR exercise, you are learning in an easy, comfortable way, how to develop vital skills for meditation and life itself — how to concentrate upon a given subject, how to be mindful, how to become an impartial observer. These benefits are another of the many reasons why this apparently simple exercise is so important.

10. Now let the tension go. You may notice what is almost like a wave of relaxation flowing down through the arms. There is a feeling of softening and loosening, relaxing and releasing.
11. Now, from the shoulders, shake the arms and hands loose. Again, almost like a rag doll, let the arms flop loose, completely relaxed.
12. Next, with the arms hanging by your sides once again, notice how they feel and compare that feeling with what you remember when you began.

13. Open your eyes, and taking hold of something if you need extra help to balance, lift one leg off the floor. Shake it loose from the ankle, like you did with your hands.
14. Next shake this whole leg. Just gently, enough to loosen the muscles and relax them all the way from the hip to the foot.
15. Put that foot back on the floor, close your eyes and compare the feeling in both legs. Most people notice quite a difference. The one you have actively relaxed may well feel lighter, freer, more relaxed.
16. Finally, lift the other foot, shake it loose from the ankle, then all the way up to the hip. Put this foot back on the floor. Close your eyes and compare the two legs again. You will notice that they feel the same as each other now, but clearly different from how they felt to begin with.

This exercise can help to demonstrate how often we carry residual tension in our bodies and how we become used to that "background" tension. Often we may think we are relaxed, either because we are out of touch with our body, or because we are unaware of how it really feels, or because quite simply we have become used to our body feeling tense and now take that feeling to be "normal". In fact we need to say in that case it is the "usual", or the "familiar," rather than the "normal".

In the true sense of the word it is normal to be relaxed. That is our natural state. However, if we have chronic stress or still carry anchored body tension left over from unresolved issues from our past, then chronic tension is



highly likely. In all my years of this work, there have been very few people I have met who did not have accumulated tension stored in their bodies.

Releasing the body's stored tension has many benefits. Firstly it relieves a drain on your energy. To hold tension in the body takes energy. Relieving tension leaves that energy free to be used for some more useful purpose. As a consequence you are bound to feel more energetic. After learning how to do this exercise and practising it, people frequently comment that they feel lighter, their body is more comfortable. Being relaxed feels good. Often too, this translates into a greater efficiency in all you do.

Here it is necessary to differentiate between being relaxed and being slack. For some I suspect, letting go means letting it all hang out like a bit of a slob! Not so. To let go and relax means to be naturally at ease and naturally efficient.

The best definition I can offer is that to be relaxed is to be in a state where you use the minimum amount of energy required for the task you are performing.

For example, when you sit to watch TV you can relax thoroughly. The only body tension you need for that task is a little to hold your back and head upright. So check for yourself. As you sit reading this, how relaxed are your legs, your arms, your back, your forehead? If in any of these areas there is more tension than that required to just sit and read, you will feel great benefit from learning how to relax more thoroughly through using this aspect of the PMR.

An even more profound effect of deep relaxation is that it can release you from the impact of stored cellular memory. Many body workers have had as an observa-

tion and a basic premise that unresolved traumas tend to anchor or be stored in particular areas of the body as cellular memory or, in the terms we have been using, chronic tension. Many techniques have been attempted, some successfully, to release these physical foci of past trauma. Some of the techniques have involved vigorous body work, some have been more gentle. Often enough these techniques have been cathartic or rather violent.

The possibility here is that really deep physical relaxation (that you do for yourself in the way described) can be effective in gently letting go these physical anchors. With this letting go, the old traumas can also be released, leaving you freer in yourself. This explains why sometimes as people use these techniques, significant old memories can surface. Often emotion comes with the memories, yet if you flow with it and just allow these things to naturally release, they can do just that. You can let them go and feel a whole new level of physical comfort as well as a delightful sense of inner freedom.

The intention of all these explanations is to help you to understand the many levels of benefit that come with practising the PMR. As the years go on I find that I continue to benefit personally from practising it and the benefits I notice in others who use it regularly are quite remarkable.

So now it is time to practise the exercise completely.

## **The Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise — The PMR**

The way to get the best from this exercise is to give it your full attention. To do it mindfully. To actually con-



tract and relax each muscle group and to focus your attention on noticing the sensations that are produced as you do so. When you do this exercise, and do it consciously, it is very reliable!

The trick is to avoid thinking about it. To avoid analysing it. Just do it and feel it! This takes you away from rational thinking and leads you towards more abstract thinking. From there it is easier to keep letting go and to flow on into stillness.

So the key is to be able to do the exercise automatically enough so that you have no need to think about what you are doing, but not so automatically that it becomes a mindless, unconscious process. This is the balance to strike. To learn it, repeat it and yet do it each time with the freshness of the first time. The attitude that helps here (added to what we have discussed on attitude already) is to have that fresh curiosity of the beginner — even if you have done it a thousand times before! And surely this is not so hard. When you pay attention, each time is different — sometimes in major ways, sometimes in only subtle, minor ways. What will it be like this time?

Experience leads me to believe that many people who read this book will have done the PMR before. Again, let me enthuse you to experiment and practise the exercise again, giving it your full attention. You may be surprised by what you notice!

A good way to begin, is to read the following transcript of the exercise and then do it for yourself. If this is how you do begin, the idea is to talk yourself through it. So read the transcript in italics. Having already become familiar with contracting and relaxing each muscle group progressively up through the body, now say the

words quietly to yourself — *"contract the muscles"* and *"let them go"* — as you actually do the exercise. Then, leaving gaps between each phrase, use the other words and phrases to evoke deeper feelings of relaxation. These other words are deliberately abstract in nature, and aim to avoid analysis or judgement. Their purpose is to help to keep you focussed and to assist in the process of letting go.

Many people find it helpful to link the saying of each phrase with their breathing. This provides a pleasant rhythm to it all and is inherently relaxing in its own right. To do this say *"Contract the muscles"* on an in breath, *"And let them go"* on the following outbreath.

Then take another whole breath in and out without saying anything. Breath in again and on the outbreath, say the next relaxing phrase like *"Letting go"*, *"Deeply"*, *"Completely"* or whatever else you are using for that purpose.

Learning and practising this approach in a group is obviously helpful as you will have a direct experience of it all. Tapes can be useful if you do not have direct access to a teacher. At home, tapes are of particular benefit because they keep you on track and they help you to develop a gentle rhythm. They remind you to pay attention, they bring your focus back if you do get distracted. Also they avoid you having to think about what to do next, you can just be led by the words and flow with them. Some people, therefore, make their own practise tapes by recording the exercise for themselves. As explained already, I have made specific tapes to complement this particular approach and book.

So here is the exercise:



You will find it best to give yourself at least 20 minutes to practise the exercise. This will leave you some time to be still at the end, just resting with the relaxed feeling you have produced.

So go to your meditation space, take up your position, check your attitude and give it a go!

*Let your eyes close gently ... Turn your thoughts inwards ... And remember that this is a time to bring the mind home ... to relax ... and let go.*

*Now, really concentrate on your feet ... Perhaps move them a little, really feel what they are like at the moment ... Now, contract the muscles of the feet, feel the tension ... And let them go ... Feel the muscles relaxing ... Feel the muscles becoming soft and loose ... Feel it deeply ... Completely ... More and more ... Letting go ...*

*The calves ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel any tension relaxing ... Soft and loose ... Feel it deeply ... It is a good feeling ... A natural feeling ... Feel the letting go ...*

*The thighs ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel it all through ... The legs feel warm and heavy ... Soft and loose ... More and more ... Letting go ...*

*The buttocks ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Deeply ... Completely ... Feel it all through the pelvis and around the hips ... Sometimes it helps to imagine a belt or band around the hips has just been loosened a little ... Relaxing ... releasing ... simply letting go ...*

*The tummy ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel it deeply ... Calm and relaxed ... Calm and relaxed ... Completely ... Feel it all through ... More and more ... Letting go ...*

*The chest ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel it all through the chest ... Now, just allow the breath to take up whatever rhythm feels comfortable for you at the moment ... Effortlessly ... Effortlessly ... It is a good feeling ... Feel the letting go ...*

*The arms ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel it in the hands particularly ... You might feel a warmth, a tingling flowing into the hands ... perhaps a lightness ... almost like they could be floating ... just going with it ... Simply letting go ...*

*The shoulders ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel the shoulders drop a little ... Feel it deeply ... More and more ... Deeper and deeper ... Letting go ...*

*The jaw ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel the jaw drop a little ... Feel it deeply ... Calm and relaxed ... The tongue soft and loose ... It is a good feeling ... Feel the letting go ...*

*And feel it up over the nose and through the cheeks ... Feel it deeply ... Completely ...*

*Now the eyes ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel it deeply ... all through the eyes ... Almost like the eyes are floating in their sockets ... The temples soft and loose ...*



*And feel it around the ears ... the back of the head ... up over the top of the head ... calm and relaxed ... Calm and relaxed ... Simply going with it ... Letting go... Simply letting go ...*

*Now the forehead ... Contract the muscles, and let them go ... Feel the forehead smoothing out ... Calm and relaxed ... Feel it all through ... Through the body and the mind ... Deeply ... Completely ... More and more ... Deeper and deeper ... Letting go ... Effortlessly ... Effortlessly ... Letting go ... Deeply ... Completely ... Letting go ... Letting go ... Letting go ...*

*Rest quietly now for a few minutes before completing the exercise, perhaps stretching a little, and then letting your eyes gently open again.*

What happened? Hopefully you did come to feel somewhat more relaxed both physically and mentally. Do realize that what you are embarking upon here is a skill like many others you have learnt. People do vary in their aptitudes for different skills and this is no commentary on what sort of person you are. All it means is that if this comes quickly for you, you are fortunate in one way; if it does take more time, be heartened. Virtually everyone who sticks at it can learn to do this exercise effectively and derive a great deal of benefit from it. While some almost fall into it from the very beginning, others do need to persevere and practise more until they get it.

So for beginners, practise this form of the PMR regularly, once or twice daily, over the first few weeks.

As you settle into it and feel confident of the technique, there are two ways to progress.



## CHAPTER 6

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# RELAXING QUICKLY AND DEEPLY

## Resting in Natural Peace

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The basic intention behind learning the Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise, is to learn how to relax physically and to calm your mind. Once you are able to do this, it makes sense to simplify the technique so that you can let go more directly. So here is another of the benefits of the PMR — it provides a very methodical starting point that is easy to learn and reliable in its effects; while it is very easy to develop in two different ways so that you can relax both quickly and deeply.

What we need to do next, is to learn how to:

1. Simplify the PMR so that you are able to relax more quickly.
2. Practise the PMR in a more thorough way so that you are able to relax more deeply.

Then you combine what you have learnt from these two techniques, so that you can relax quickly and deeply.

## **1. HOW TO RELAX MORE QUICKLY —**

### **Simplifying the Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise**

Using a number of easy steps, you can learn how to relax your body just as effectively as you did with the PMR, but now doing it more quickly. Experiment with each of these steps, practising them until you are confident that the new technique helps you to relax as deeply as you were able to when you were using the full PMR. You may need to experiment with the new exercises and then go back to the old one. With some experience most people can progress through these steps fairly quickly.

#### **(a) Practise the PMR without first contracting your muscles**

This means you start by focusing your attention on your feet, notice what sensations are present at that moment, and then feel them relax. In other words, without contracting the muscles first, you simply let them go. Then move on up through the rest of your body, progressively relaxing each muscle group.

Do talk yourself through this as you did with the full PMR exercise. Give it your full attention. If you find it difficult at first to feel that letting go sensation, then experiment. Perhaps contract the muscles a little, then let them go. Perhaps a little movement helps. Really pay attention to the letting go feeling and get used to triggering it without contracting the muscles first.



For most people this takes only a few practise sessions. Then continue to practise it some more to gain experience and confidence.

### **(b) Link the muscle groups together**

Now, rather than letting go the muscles of the feet, calves and thighs separately and in order, link the three and relax the legs as one unit. Again, you may need to experiment. Try it the old way again and persevere a little. Then link buttocks, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms. Then neck and head as another unit.

This too, usually can be learnt fairly quickly. Do take time to practise enough so that you are competent and confident before you move on.

### **(c) Rapid Relaxation**

The final aim is to be able to relax the whole body — rapidly — almost like throwing a switch. There are a number of ways to do this. You may like to experiment and find which works best for you.

#### **(i) Linking all the muscle groups together as one.**

This is a continuation of (b) and works well for many.

#### **(ii) Using the sigh to trigger the Relaxation Response.**

This is a very useful technique that is well worth practising even if (i) also works for you.

The sigh is one of the body's natural mechanisms for relaxing. It is worth studying what happens

when you sigh, then we can build on that natural process to develop this very useful relaxation tool.

When you sigh you first take a somewhat deeper breath in. If you do this with your eyes closed, you will probably notice that as you breathe in, it feels as if energy rises up through your body towards your head. As you sigh the breath out (it helps to actually make the sound of the sigh as you breathe out and experiment with this), it will feel as if that energy flows down through your body taking with it a natural wave of relaxation. It is almost as if you can feel your body progressively relaxing from the head down. When you do practise this, and if you do already have a familiarity with the PMR, you are bound to be able to feel it quite clearly, and strongly.

With practise, it means that you can learn to trigger the relaxation response by consciously taking a deeper breath in, gently sighing the breath out and letting go, allowing your body to relax with the out-breath. This can be done quite subtly so that no one around you would even notice. It is a marvellously effective and reliable way of diffusing stress and returning to a calmer, more relaxed state.

### **(iii) The Rapid Relaxation Exercise**

This is a short exercise which can be used for rapid relaxation or as a preparation for meditation. It combines several of the elements we have discussed into an abbreviated and convenient form.

**NOTE:** when you do this exercise, lead yourself through it saying the words slowly and with comfortable gaps between the words. Perhaps you use



the breathing technique, taking a breath between each word or phrase and saying the words to yourself on the outbreath. Do sound the sigh out loud.

Take up your meditation position.

*Take a deeper breath in, and when you do breathe out, make a gentle sighing sound, like ... Aaaahhh. It is useful to make the sound as it does help to trigger that natural relaxation response. As you sigh the breath out, you may well notice almost like a wave of relaxation flowing down through your body ... softening ... loosening ...relaxing ... releasing.*

*Then do that once again, breathing in more deeply, gently sighing the breath out ... Just allow the breath then to take up whatever rhythm feels comfortable for you at the moment ... Effortlessly ... Effortlessly*

*Another breath in, gently sighing the breath out ... And feeling the letting go ... Letting go.*

*Now, move your back a little from side to side ... Just a gentle swaying motion, just enough to feel your spine move across its point of balance. And as you do that, feel the muscles up either side of the back ... softening ... loosening ... relaxing ... releasing. The spine then coming to rest in its point of balance.*

*Another deeper breath in, gently sighing the breath out.*

*Now move your head a little from side to side ... Again, just a gentle swaying motion, enough to feel your head move across its point of balance.*

*And as you do that, feel the muscles up either side of the neck relaxing ... releasing ... letting go. ... the head then coming to rest in its point of balance.*

*Another deeper breath in, gently sighing the breath out ...*

*Now, move your head a little from front to back ... Perhaps tilt it a little from side to side ... It may help to raise and lower the shoulders a little ... Feel the ease of the movement ... Almost as if the head is a helium balloon just floating there ... the neck like a string ... gently holding it in place ... The head almost like it is floating ... floating and coming to rest in the point of balance ... Simply resting in the point of balance for a few minutes ... Resting ... in the point of balance.*

This exercise only takes a few minutes to complete. It can be used as a stepping-stone in the process of learning to relax more quickly or you can use it when you need to relax, but do not have much time. For some people it is even effective as a more regular preparation for entering the state of meditation.

However, before we move on to cover meditation in detail, we need to consider how to relax more thoroughly. To be confident of what we are doing, we need to know what "thoroughly" means. So first we will investigate the range of sensations you may experience as you relax physically and move towards the inner silence.



## **What Happens as You Relax More Deeply?<sup>1</sup>**

This is the best point to take a diversion and detail the range of sensations people can experience as they do relax more deeply. To benefit from this knowledge you will need to regard the process of relaxing as being like a journey and to view this explanation of the range of experiences as something like a map of the territory ahead. Do be patient with whatever point you are at along your journey and avoid the temptation to become frustrated that you are not further advanced. Do remember that the two biggest barriers to effective meditation are trying to make something happen and trying to assess how well you are doing. Both of these are core mind activities, keep you agitated and busy, and prevent you from letting go and entering the silence.

So with that caution and proviso, here we go! This outline will help you to recognize where you are along the journey, to reassure you and give you extra confidence to proceed.

When you first begin, you will be paying more attention to your body, so any pre-existing sensations will be more obvious. Hence if you have any tension, discomfort or pain it is quite likely to be more noticeable.

As you begin to relax almost invariably any unpleasant sensations tend to fade away. It is as if you can let go of them too.

For most people the first sign of real relaxation is a feeling of heaviness. It is a kind of settling, like the gentle pull of gravity just weighing you down a little more.

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1. There is a summary of this in the chart on pp. 32 and 33 of *Peace of Mind*.

Some feel it almost like being an icecream left out in the sun that is just melting a little around the edges, like a feeling of melting into the chair or the floor.

At the same time your perception of temperature may change. Some feel warmer, some cooler, usually as time goes on these changes settle and you remain neutral.

As you do relax more deeply, the feeling of heaviness commonly gives way to a lighter feeling, almost as if you could be floating. This feeling is often associated with a heightened sense of wellbeing, even something of a euphoria.

Often then, with or beyond this feeling of lightness, comes a "hollow body" feeling. Many people describe this, saying they are aware of the outline of their body, but inside they have this hollow feeling. Not that this is an empty feeling, again usually people really enjoy the feeling. It has a vibrance and almost a radiance about it, a strong sense of energy and imminence. It is a good feeling.

Next, the awareness of the body can change quite dramatically. These experiences too are associated with a sense of wellbeing and usually a greater sense of calm; perhaps even that first inkling of deeper stillness.

Curiously, descriptions of these particular body sensations have changed over the years. In earlier days, when *You Can Conquer Cancer* and *Peace of Mind* were written, many people described the feeling of their body expanding, as if being blown up like a balloon. They described how the outer perimeter of their body, which normally we think of and feel as being quite sharp, came to feel fuzzy, furry or vague. You can get a sense of this if you imagine that you are floating in a nice warm swim-



ming pool, feeling as if you are in your skin and your body (with its skin!) is in the pool. As you relax in this way, it feels as if the boundary of your skin expands and dissolves so that you feel as if you take up the space of all the water. This can expand even further into a quite wondrous sense of infinite spaciousness. This too is a good feeling!

However, over recent years, less people report this experience; more have the sensation of parts of their body going missing! By this I mean they can be sitting there, deeply relaxed, and yet if they dwell on it, there is an awareness that there is no awareness of some parts of the body. Most commonly this will involve the hands and perhaps the lower arms, sometimes the legs or more major body areas. Curiously too, it is not as if these parts feel as if they just fade away progressively. They disappear in "chunks", almost like quantum pieces.

Just staying with either of these changes in body awareness, resting with them, letting go a little more perhaps, the natural progression is that next you will lose awareness of the body altogether.

Most commonly this leads to a transition phase which typically is marked by the sort of phenomena that many people hope to experience in meditation. Often misguidedly, many think that to experience inner phenomena is the real aim of meditation. This leads to a lot of hype, unnecessary glamour and distraction. To get caught in this phase is sadly to miss the point. The point is to go beyond all phenomena and to experience your own true nature. At worst, phenomena are red herrings and diversions; at best, heartening confirmations that you are passing through this particular transition phase, that whatever you have been doing is having a good

effect and that if you keep going, let go a little more, you are not far from a really worthwhile experience.

The most important value of the transition phase is that it indicates you are in transit between the active mind and the still mind. This is the stage where your mind is actually settling, really letting go and you are about to enter stillness. So do not lose it. Take heart and go with it!

In this transition phase, the most common phenomena experienced is the spontaneous appearance of an inner light. Typically the light is coloured and the colours are vivid, bright and pure. Frequently described as astral colours, people involved in esoterics will sometimes make a big deal of interpreting the significance of the different colours and their appearance. For me, this is interesting to some degree, but easily leads to diversions that can delay further progress. For me it is better to use the colours in the following way.

Firstly, they are a clear indication that you are in this transition phase and so you can be confident that you are making good progress. As nearly always these lights are associated with a good feeling, you might as well enjoy them!

Usually the colours move and the movement itself offers a means of progressing. When the colours first appear they often appear as small round coloured lights off in the distance, that appear to move towards you, getting bigger as they come. Then they can dissolve, only to reappear in the distance and return in cycles. Others may appear as a field of colour in front of you and recede off into the distance. Sometimes they pulse backward and forwards.



On noticing these colours for the first time, many people are a little surprised, perhaps delighted something has happened. And then they attempt to analyze them. Now, these colours appear in the transition phase when your mind is becoming still. As soon as you attempt to analyze — What is happening? What does this mean? What will happen next? — you reactivate your mind and of course, the colours disappear!

If you experiment a little you may notice that the more you activate thinking, the faster the colours move or even disappear altogether; the more you let go, the slower the colours move. So this can provide useful feedback and help you to learn how to let go more effectively.

As you do let go more, you may start to feel that instead of the colours being like a 2 dimensional disc moving or pulsing in front of you, they begin to feel more like a 3-dimensional cloud which you can feel all around you.

Letting go more, its as if you merge into, or dissolve into the cloud, much like that feeling described of the body dissolving in the swimming pool. Then the transition can flow into the experience of inner silence.

You can use the knowledge of this natural occurring phenomena, to actively imagine the colour being like a cloud, to feel yourself moving into that cloud, merging and dissolving with it. The key is to do all this with intention and clarity, yet effortlessly, without struggle or striving. With the natural ease of simply letting go!

Some people experience other phenomena from time to time, such as visions, inner sounds or music. All can be interpreted on some level and may be useful. I prefer not to dwell on them and instead, to move on into the

more profound experience of merging with the inner silence.

To add a little more here, once the mind does become still, the most common experience is of being in infinite space. Not a void, although this space does have the qualities of being empty in one sense; but it does have far more, it has the quality of imminence. For it is the creative ground from which all things arise and into which all things fall. This is why to enter this space, is to enter a sacred space. For this is where you begin to feel the presence of the divine.

Going with it a little more, one flows on from an awareness of infinite space to the experience of feeling yourself to be a part of an infinite consciousness. This is a truly mystical experience, where you feel and know yourself to be a part of the unity and interconnectedness of all things.

Sometimes this experience is accompanied by visions. Happily Christians have Christian visions, Buddhists have Buddhist visions and so on! It seems fair to say that this type of experience is recorded in a realm beyond the normal mind (which has its own conditioning and memories). As the experience is retained, when we return to the realm of the conscious mind, that conscious aspect of mind attempts to interpret the experience. This it does in line with its training and culture. So it is extremely rare for Christians to have the Buddha turn up in this mystical way, or vice versa!

The other major experience that can occur in this level of the stillness is profound, personal insight. Insight that usually relates to old traumatic events. In this stage of



meditation, old memories, perhaps previously locked deep in the unconscious, can arise spontaneously, be viewed dispassionately like an impartial observer, and released. This experience, like the other two, can be profoundly transformative and have major therapeutic and personal significance. This naturally occurring phenomena also has led to the development of specific techniques aimed at producing the associated benefits. Some indications on this are given in the Insight Meditation section of *Peace of Mind*. Generally speaking, to actively pursue such memories and experiences is best done with the help of an experienced teacher.

However, here we need to know that there is still more to consider. These three experiences in stillness, the feeling of being in infinite space, of being a part of an infinite consciousness and of experiencing major insights, all are very useful, but still have a limiting factor. The limiting factor is the subtle level of duality still involved in each experience. I am experiencing infinite space, I am a part of an infinite consciousness, I am having a profound insight. "I". "I" and the experience — the duality. While all three experiences do have a strong sense of unity, and having such a direct experience is quite transformative in itself, it still is like I am having this experience, I am a part of that unity. The next step is to let go of that sense of "I" altogether. To enter a state of non-duality.

This is the really radical bit. The part they talk of when they say that you must die before being born again. This deep, fundamental "I" is the bit that must go. Really, it would not be so hard if we were not so attached to our own individuality, ego and experience! However, it would seem that the reward that comes with letting go

and taking this final step is well worthwhile. Then you experience your own true nature. Directly, immediately, as a profound and indescribable experience.

Now perhaps the best news is the happy prospect that all this actually is possible! It could be that you will actually have this most profound, yet simplest of experiences. This experience of full enlightenment. This must be the best reason of all to keep meditating!

Hoping then, that it is not too much of an anticlimax, and having covered something of the range of experiences as you relax and enter meditation, let us return to where we began this diversion, discussing the process of relaxing more thoroughly.

## **HOW TO RELAX MORE DEEPLY**

With these exercises, the aim is to spend more time on the PMR, paying even more attention to relaxing each area. The intention is to attend to any deep-seated, chronic tension and to relax the body completely.

### **Using the PMR exercise more thoroughly**

This exercise can be done sitting up, although lying down allows you to relax even more thoroughly. You may need to practise a little so that you stay awake while you are lying down. Once you master that, this exercise provides another level of benefit.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there are a couple of variations to experiment with! There are several variations of the PMR we can experiment with or we can use a much more detailed relaxation technique.



## **Using the PMR with follow up body scanning**

Start by completing the basic PMR exercise using the contraction and relaxation of the muscles. Do it thoroughly, with full attention. When you reach the forehead and complete the basic exercise, then return to the feet and begin to scan up through your body. To do this, it is almost as if you move your attention up through the body, sieving through the body and releasing any tension that may still remain.

Generally, what people notice as they do this is that most of the body does feel quite deeply relaxed. With a little experience, commonly these deeply relaxed areas of the body come to have that "hollow body" feeling. Scanning through these areas is easy. They feel light and spacious. There are no obstacles to the scanning process.

However, also quite commonly, there will be some areas that do not feel so relaxed. Usually by comparison, they feel thicker, denser, harder. Different from the rest of the body. Typically, most people feel that having completed the PMR, something like 90% of their body is deeply relaxed and "clear" in this sense, and only a small area feels as if it could be relaxed some more.

**Special Note:** Based on my experience, one of the really worthwhile goals in preparing for deeper meditation (particularly when physical health and healing are major issues) is to consciously relax the body to the point where it feels the same all over. Do, however, be prepared to be content with as much progress towards this goal as you can in any given session. Certainly, ideally, I would aim to give full conscious awareness to relaxing the body physically before beginning any meditation session and to take the time required to relax it to

the point where it feels the same all over. Sometimes this process can be completed rapidly, other times, perhaps even more commonly, you could spend a whole session working towards it and not completely get there. However, do know that any progress towards a goal is worthwhile, this one particularly.

And with practise, it does become easier and more consistent.

## **Relaxing tensor areas**

### **(i) Relax generally**

The more attention you give to relaxing the areas that are easy to relax the more generalized the relaxation will become. This is because the mind and body are so intimately connected. The more you relax the body, the more messages go to the brain to relax, and the cycle goes around — the more the brain relaxes, the more a general message goes out to all the body to relax still more. This, of course will help the tensor areas to relax more deeply too.

So it can be that by repeating the PMR a second or third time, without giving any particular attention to these "difficult" areas, you can end up with the body fully relaxed.

### **(ii) Focus on the tension**

Focus on the residual tense areas and let them go. Once you are familiar with the feeling of letting go (the feeling you have learnt through the regular practise of the PMR) you can hold your attention on these different areas and simply relax them, let them go,



release them. This is like the exercise with the PMR when you do it without contracting the muscles first. You simply let them go. Sometimes this can be helped by gently tensing muscles around the area first. Perhaps even more usefully, you could experiment with gentle movement in the area, using the movement to focus and heighten the feeling of letting go. For example, with the back, moving the spine a little from side to side as in the Rapid Relaxation exercise, can be very effective. Movements in this situation are best if they are small, gentle and slow.

The feeling of letting go can have two different qualities. One is where the tight, dense area feels as if it is dissolving, as in shrinking and collapsing in on itself — a bit like ice melting into nothingness. The other is where it expands, disperses and disappears — a bit like a coloured gas in the confines of a balloon, with the balloon expanding, bursting and the gas dispersing away into nothingness. Experiment and notice what works for you.

### (iii) Use imagery

Using active imagery to disperse tension. There are many variations on this theme, many possibilities. The two most powerful techniques I know and the ones we use most frequently, are the white light imagery and a specific mindfulness exercise.

#### **The White Light Imagery Exercise<sup>1</sup>**

It is worth taking the time to detail this exercise for you. While there are a number of variations of this

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1. Another variation of the White Light Imagery Exercise that we commonly use is in *Peace of Mind*, p. 185–189.

particular exercise too, this version is well suited to our purpose of relaxing deeply. Be aware that this exercise has great potential. It is a reliable technique for regenerating energy, has powerful healing potentials and is a profound technique for connecting with your spiritual essence.

*Take up your position, relax physically.*

*Imagine now, as if it were in the sky above you, the highest source of power that you know. The embodiment of your own Truth. It may be an image that symbolizes God, it may be the figure of Christ, Mother Mary or a particular saint. You may prefer a more abstract image such as the sun which could represent the source of Universal Energy. Whichever of these symbolic images you find most helpful, imagine too that as well as a source of energy, this is a source of love and compassion, of loving kindness, of a presence that has your own best interest at heart.*

*As this image forms in your mind, allow yourself to imagine what it would feel like to come into the presence of this Divine Source of Energy. What would it be like to feel yourself in the presence of God? Or Christ? Or the source of Universal Energy?*

*Sometimes as you feel yourself coming closer to that presence, you may wish to say something — a prayer, an explanation, a request. Sometimes, something may be said to or for you, so you could listen for that.*



*Once you feel this Divine presence as if it is in the sky above you, imagine that a beam of white light begins to flow from its very centre, down towards you. An outpouring of energy and loving kindness. If you are focussed upon a figure, imagine this light flowing from its very heart. If you are using the sun, imagine the shaft of light flowing from its very centre.*

*Imagine too, that this beam of white light has liquid properties. It is like a beam of liquid white light that has a pleasant warmth to it, almost like a gentle glow.*

*Now as this beam of warm, liquid, white light reaches your head, it not only flows down around your body, but also it flows through your body. Warm, liquid, white light, slowly flowing down through your body. Almost like water filtering down through dry sand.*

*Warm liquid white light, flowing from that Divine source and flowing down through every part of your body. Like having a wash on the inside. It washes away anything old or worn or unwanted. It brings with it a new energy, a vitality, a sense of healing and wholeness. You can feel it filling your body and your being, or you may see this quite visually or you may have it as a feeling experience — like feeling a flow of energy or a sensation of warmth moving down through your body. When the light does flow down to the end of your arms it will flow out the end of the fingers. When it does reach the end of your legs, it will flow out through the*

*feet, washing away with it anything old, worn or unwanted.*

*When this light comes to difficult, tense, painful or blocked areas, it washes through them, clearing them, relaxing them, letting them go. You may see the affected area as having a particular shape and/or colour. When the light reaches such an area, you may see that colour being washed away like a stain washed away from clothes held under running water. You may see the area dissolved from the outside in. Some people find it helpful to imagine the light being concentrated almost like a laser. This then burns away the affected blockage — either from the outside in or from the inside out.*

*The aim is to see and feel this warm liquid light to be filling every part of the body with the same degree of intensity. To feel the same all over. Filled with the vigour, the vitality, the radiance of the warm liquid white light.*

*As this feeling becomes all-encompassing, it is as if you merge with it; almost as if you dissolve into the light. You feel it through your body and your mind. It is as if you become at one with it. Given that it stems from a Divine source, this can feel like merging or re-uniting with the Divine. It can be a powerful experience.*

*You conclude by merely resting in the presence of that light and the Divine Energy it represents and carries.*



## **Mindfulness and Impermanence**

One of the most remarkable experiences in meditation can be to give your full attention to something in a mindful way, and to have it disappear! This can be particularly dramatic when confronted with pain, and it forms the basis of the key meditation technique we will experiment with soon. This approach also can work well to release residual tension.

Here is what to do. You can begin by learning the following series of questions by heart, so that you can put them to yourself as you meditate. Alternatively obtain a tape with this exercise on it (it is on Side B of my "Effective Pain Management" tape), record the exercise on your own tape, or ask someone to calmly read the exercise to you.

The exercise is most powerful when you answer the questions out loud. However, you may not need to be this thorough if you only have mild obstacles or pains to deal with, or if you are well used to the exercise and can do it with good attention. This is another of those exercises that if you do it casually it is not very effective, but done with concentrated attention, it can produce remarkable results. The capacity of this exercise to relieve even severe pain never ceases to amaze me. For milder residual tensions as we have been discussing here, it is usually dramatic.

So to begin<sup>1</sup>:

1. Sit or lie in a symmetrical position and close your eyes.
2. Relax as completely as you can without giving this step too much attention. Do not try to force yourself to relax; do it as easily and as deeply as you can. If you have already established a practice of meditation, aim to recall the feeling of deep relaxation and to elicit the Relaxation Response.
3. Move your attention through the body, seeking out an area that feels different — an area that is painful, tight, under pressure, etc.
4. Be aware of where the sensation is in your body, for example the tummy. Be as specific as possible, is it close to the skin, deep in the abdomen, in the upper or lower region, etc. Where is it?
5. Be aware of its shape. Is it like a ball, a sphere, a rod? What is its shape?
6. Be aware of its size. How long is it? How many inches or centimetres? How wide is it? How deep is it? What size is it?
7. Be aware of its density. Does it feel heavy or light? Is it the same all the way through? Or softer on the outside or softer on the inside? What is its density?
8. What is its surface texture like? Is its surface soft and fuzzy, or hard and smooth? Or something in between? What does it feel like?

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1. This is similar to the exercise in *Peace of Mind*, page 178, with the temperature and breathing exercises added on the end.



9. *What temperature is it? Is it hotter than the surrounding tissue, or cooler? Or is it neutral? What temperature is it?*
10. *What colour is it? If it had a colour, what would its colour be?*
11. *Now as you hold your attention on this area, when you next breathe in, follow your breath in as it flows towards the area, flowing then around the outside of the area. As you breathe out, feel the breath gently ebb away. A bit like water flowing around an object on the edge of the sea — the water flowing up and around it, then gently ebbing away.*
12. *Repeat this three times. Following the breath each time as it flows in and moves around the outside of the area, gently ebbing away with the outbreath.*
13. *Now with the next inbreath, follow the breath as it flows directly into the very centre of the area, right into its core. Then as you breathe out again, feel the breath gently ebb away. Repeat this three times.*
14. *With the next inbreath, follow the breath again as it goes towards and around the outside of the area, gently ebbing away with the outbreath. And repeat this three more times.*
15. *Now pay fresh attention to the area once more. Repeat the questions: Where is it located? What shape is it? What size? What density does it have? What is its surface texture like? What temperature? And what colour?*
16. *Then repeat the three groups of three breathing exercises.*

17. *You can keep repeating this sequence; however, very commonly after doing it with full attention, once, twice or three times, whatever you focussed upon will have dissolved completely!*

This can be an amazing experience, particularly for someone who has the experience of severe (often chronic) pain disappear in the few minutes the exercise takes.

How can this be? The exercise actually reveals in a very immediate way a basic Buddhist principle. The technique itself, actually is based upon an old Buddhist meditation practice called "The Meditation on Impermanence." The intention of the practice is to demonstrate that nothing is permanent, all is illusion and even pain has no real substance to it. When you investigate it closely, when you examine it as an impartial observer, you find it simply dissolves. This reveals a mystery that warrants some reflection and contemplation in its own right.

The immediate joy is that the technique works and you can test it for yourself.

## **Using more detailed relaxation**

With this technique, instead of doing the PMR with areas the size of the foot, we focus our attention on smaller areas, starting first with just one toe. Concentrate on either big toe, and, as if you are travelling through it in your mind, imagine relaxing the skin, then moving under the skin and relaxing the muscles. It is as if you are in each tiny area, almost like sieving through



it again with your mind. Then travel through the joints and the bones, all through, every part. There is no need here for a detailed anatomical knowledge, although if you happen to have that, do use it! Simply imagine relaxing the toe in great detail until you feel it totally relaxed.

As you practise this method it can be remarkable just how long you can spend on one tiny area and what depth of relaxation you can develop. It can be quite possible to spend a whole session of anything from 20 minutes, even up to an hour, on one toe! However, when you come back to that toe next time, you will find it much easier and quicker to relax it to that same profound depth.

So then you go on to the detailed relaxation of the next toe, and so on until, after many such sessions, you have relaxed the whole body in exquisite detail.

## **PUTTING IT TOGETHER — RELAXING QUICKLY AND DEEPLY**

Obviously, what we have just discussed involves two separate exercises. From the first we learn to relax more quickly, the second more deeply. Now we combine the two so that we can relax quickly and deeply.

With practise this will work well. However, some days it may take a little more time, a little more effort than others. This too is normal. Some days you will be relaxed to begin with and it is all quite effortless. Other days perhaps a little tired or sore, you will have to go back to your technique, work at it a little and help your body to relax and let go.

Every time you meditate, there is the strong recommendation to take the time to consciously relax as thoroughly as you comfortably can in that particular session.

*Meditation — Pure and Simple* — was that the title? Already we have covered so much. Remember to stick with the principles, the essence is to simply let go and be still.

What has been presented here so far, in such detail, is how to actually do it. How to prepare and create the right conditions in which you will actually be able to let go. If this were so easy, everyone would be doing it and it would be no big deal. However, do be comforted that it is feasible, it is possible and with the right preparation, some discipline and perseverance, you will get there.

The key is to practise these techniques often enough and long enough so that they become almost like second nature. Then you can just do them, enter into this relaxed and calm state, before letting go more thoroughly and entering the silence.

Having spent so much time detailing how to relax physically, now we need to attend to calming the mind. Then we can experiment with some exercises that reliably lead into the silence. Simple Silence.



## CHAPTER 7

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# ENTERING THE SILENCE

## Letting Go and Letting Be

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I cannot resist saying it again. To enter the silence of profound meditation, there is nothing you need to do. Simply let go and be still. While you can learn techniques that will help you to relax your body and calm your mind, to enter the stillness of deep meditation, you need to let go of the techniques, let go of any sense of "doing", and to open yourself to the direct experience of "being".

Can you do it in the simplest possible way — by simply letting go and being still? Some can — a blessed few! What if it has not been so simple for you? Hopefully, help is on the way!

## CALMING THE MIND

When it comes to techniques, there are only two principles that effectively calm the mind. Remember "meditation" techniques can only calm the mind. To still the mind we need to let go of the technique and rest in the stillness. However, meditation techniques can be very useful, even essential and they all use one or the other of these two basic principles; a few use both.

The two principles that help to calm the mind and lead it into stillness are concentration and observation.

What you will notice if you reflect upon it, is that the way we have been using the PMR exercise, uses both these principles. We concentrate on contracting and relaxing the muscles progressively up through the body. And we impartially observe the feelings associated with the contracting and relaxing. As the way in which we use the PMR technique employs both principles, no wonder that for many people this technique is enough to take them beyond simple relaxation into a deep state of inner calm. For some, it takes them to that point where they can let go even more thoroughly and merge into the stillness.

This is why I call this technique (based upon the PMR) Integral Meditation. It uses all the basic principles of meditation, integrating them into one methodical technique. It also creates a sense of personal balance and so integrates all aspects of our being. It remains for me the most powerful and direct starting point for profound meditation.

Another thing to notice here: when people first use the Integral Meditation approach, they do it with the open minded curiosity of a beginner. All of this being new and fresh, they pay attention, use the technique fully and it works. Most people feel like that; they get somewhere with it quite quickly. They soon feel more relaxed, calmer, with a greater sense of inner peace.

Quite commonly, however, after a while, people start to complain that it does not seem to be working so well. On investigating this, often it is apparent that several things have happened.



The first is that good experiences lead to the desire to repeat them. There is the urge to make it happen again. Then come the comparisons and doubts. "It is not like it was yesterday. What is happening? Am I doing something wrong? Oh I do hope it happens again." Striving and comparing — the two biggest obstacles to effective meditation! The solution is to go back to that beginners mind. Let go of expectations and judgements. Like going to the good film, be passive, alert and receptive. Be interested to notice what does happen today. Be open. Let go. Let it flow.

A different complication can be complacency. "I have done it before, I can do it in my sleep." — I go to sleep!! The exercises require concentration and observation to be fully effective. Remind yourself of the importance of the exercise, of the possible benefits from relaxing, calming the mind and letting go. Then do it with a natural ease — yes! With a calm detachment — yes! But also with a clear intention and a fiery longing. This is the quality to learn from martial arts. The purpose and the resolve, the discipline required to climb a mountain. This is no soft option, but it does have a soft clarity about it all.

On an even more practical level, what can happen is that you learn to relax physically sooner than you learn to calm and still the mind. In a short space of time, most people learn how to relax physically quite quickly and deeply. What this means is that instead of requiring the time it takes to complete the full PMR exercise, you can sit down and relax deeply in a few moments. Now, from the mind's point of view, having that detailed physical relaxation exercise to concentrate upon and observe, was a wonderful vehicle to carry it (the mind) from its normal busyness into a calmer state. For the mind that process

can take time. So if now you simplify and speed up the physical relaxation, the mind may well have lost its means of relaxing, switching off and letting go.

Faced with this apparent dilemma, some people continue to use the PMR in full, not because they need it to relax physically so much, but because they need it to help their mind to relax.

So it may be that some days you can do it quickly and it works for body and mind. Some days your body may be tired or ailing and need more attention, and some days your mind may need the support offered by using the body to lead it into a more relaxed and calm state. This is where experience and practise counts. As you progress you will develop an instinct for what you need to do on a given day, for a given circumstance. You learn to do whatever is necessary, whatever it takes to meet your needs.

So for many people, what we have covered so far is enough! The process of Integral Meditation based upon the PMR and all we do with it, provides the basis for learning deep relaxation and effective meditation. It may well launch you into Simple Silence.

For years this was all I taught. However, the most common complaint I received over the years was that people felt they could let go physically really well and were then left sitting there in a delightful relaxed body, with a mind that was still motoring along!

There had to be more. A more direct way, a more precise way, to learn how to let go and to enter the silence. Putting together gems from several teachers and books, noticing what people found useful in the groups, and being blessed with the odd inspiration, a few years ago



a means to achieve all this came to light. Having tested it with many people and groups now, it seems reasonable to share this approach more widely.

## **Entering the Silence — The Heart's Essence of Meditation**

To be given the direction that in meditation "there is nothing you need to do, just let go and be still", is accurate enough but often it is of little use in a practical sense. It does not tell you how to let go! So here are a series of simple yet effective exercises which can give you the "how to" of letting go, the "how to" of entering the silence. These exercises will give you the "mechanics" of how to do it.

The way to proceed is to do each of these short exercises in turn and then go on to the next one. That may sound obvious, but each exercise only takes a few minutes and the sequence builds upon itself, so it is best to do them in order.

Do these exercises in your normal meditation place, in your normal position. If it is convenient, do them sitting up. (You can lie down if you prefer.) Do the exercises as experiments, with that open beginners mind, free of expectations, just interested to notice what happens. You are bound to enjoy it and it will be interesting to be sure!

Read the first experiment, do it, then read the follow-up to that experiment. Then move on to the next and so on. To help this process, we have set the experiments out in a spacious manner.





## EXPERIMENT 1

*Take up your position to meditate, close your eyes, relax briefly in your own way.*

*Now, notice what you are thinking about. Notice what thoughts are coming into your mind at this particular moment.*

*Do this for just a minute or two then open your eyes and come back to the book.*

What did you notice? One of two things is likely to have happened.

Firstly, you may have noticed that actually you were thinking! This may sound a bit obvious, but you may have noticed that there were thoughts and that you could notice them. In other words, there was a part of you, this observer part, that was aware of thoughts as they came into your mind. Part of this also may have been that you were distracted in some way by the way your body felt or by some sounds or activities around you. This too you may have "noticed" and been able to observe.

The other possibility is that when you looked, it was as if there were no thoughts at all!

This can come as quite a surprise, especially if you have been working hard at calming your mind, hoping to experience some stillness. For about 50% of people who try it, this little experiment can give a direct experience of stillness.

This exercise can demonstrate the power of becoming an impartial observer. When we just "look" at our thoughts in this open, experimental way, just being content to notice what thoughts we are having, what thoughts are coming into our awareness at this particular time; when we become the impartial observer, very often our thoughts rapidly settle and often simply stop altogether. We experience some moments of silence.

Now if you are one of the people for whom this did happen, already you have a technique for becoming still and entering silence. It may well be that you can repeat this effect and hold it, thereby having a means to enter deep meditation.

More probably, you have the basis on which to build. You will have to experiment with this for yourself, but you may well find that after a while outer distractions or your thoughts do begin to intrude and disturb the inner silence. Ideally you can deal with these "disturbances" by simply observing them; allowing them to come when they are ready and go when they are ready. A bit like white clouds drifting across a blue sky. They just come when they are ready and go when they are ready. The focus is on the stillness or the sky, and the "distractions" are like the clouds drifting peacefully by.

However, if as you observed your thoughts, all you noticed was the stream of your thoughts with no stillness, or if the intrusions become frustrating, there is much more we can do to move past them and consciously enter the silence.

My suggestion is that everyone is likely to benefit from experimenting with the following exercises.



## EXPERIMENT 2

For this experiment, choose something that you can think about. Particularly for those who in the first experiment had their thoughts disappear, now we want to actually have some thoughts to observe. So, perhaps you can think about what you might do during the rest of the day or perhaps tomorrow.

*Take up your position for meditation, relax briefly in your own way. Now think about what you might do for the rest of the day. Notice the thoughts as they arise. There is no need to do anything else. Just notice the thoughts that come into your awareness as you think of what you might do later in the day.*

What did you notice? Did you notice that there was a part of you, that observer part, that was noticing the thoughts?

How then did you notice your thoughts? How did you know you were thinking? This may seem a peculiar question; people often reply, "well I just thought them." The question is *how* did you register the thoughts? How did you *know* you were thinking?

Almost certainly you registered your thoughts in one of three ways:

1. As pictures — almost like video clips passing by in your mind.
2. As words — almost like a conversation going on as the thoughts passed by.

3. As feelings — almost as if you felt them, were doing them, sensed them.

Some people use more than one of these modes of thinking at the one time, but most have one as their dominant, most frequent mode of thinking. Which was it for you? Let us check again with another simple exercise.



### EXPERIMENT 3

*Take up your position and relax briefly in your own way.*

*This time, think again of what you might do later in the day. As the thoughts form, notice how it is that you perceive them — are they appearing as pictures, words or feelings?*

*As you continue to notice your thoughts, start to be aware of how each thought is like a unit. It has a beginning, runs its course and come to an end. It is as if each thought is a separate segment — like an individual video clip, section of words, or sequence of feelings.*

*So as you think about what you might do later in the day, continue to be aware of how you actually notice your thoughts and observe how they are like individual units or segments.*

How did you go? As you continue with these exercises, the speed with which the thoughts appear begins to slow down a little. Often you can notice each thought more clearly and it becomes fairly easy to notice how each thought has a start, main body and end point.

It becomes clear that each thought is like a segment, or self contained unit and that you can observe it passing by.

Now for the really interesting bit!





## EXPERIMENT 4

*Take up your position for meditation, relax briefly in your own way.*

*This time let go of the intention of thinking of anything in particular and simply notice what thoughts, if any, arise. Simply let the thoughts come when they are ready, and go when they are ready.*

*As thoughts form, notice how each one has a start, runs its course and finishes.*

*Now — notice how as one thought finishes, there is often a gap before the next thought starts. Being content to allow any thoughts just to come when they are ready and to go when they are ready, give your attention now to noticing the end of one thought, and the gap before the next thought arises.*

*Shift your focus of attention from the thoughts themselves to the gap. Let the thoughts go and hold your attention on the gaps between the thoughts.*

What did you notice? If your thoughts are still coming so fast that they seem like an endless stream, be patient. The more you repeat these exercises, the more the thoughts will slow down and you will begin to notice the gaps.

Obviously in the gap between two thoughts there has to be a moment of stillness. So for many people, observing

the gap between their thoughts is a powerful way of experiencing some stillness. With this as a starting point, we can make more of it.



## EXPERIMENT 5

Now it is time to investigate the stillness revealed in the gap between the thoughts.

*Take up your position for meditation, relax briefly in your own way.*

*Allow thoughts to arise spontaneously, just coming when they are ready and going when they are ready. Give your attention to noticing the gaps between the thoughts.*

*As you focus more clearly on the gaps, you may well notice that in the stillness of the gaps there is an obvious silence. In fact you may notice that it is as if this silence is a background across which the thoughts travel. It can be a bit like the silence is represented by the clear, blue sky, and occasional white clouds drift by representing thoughts as they come when they are ready and go when they are ready.*

*So it is now as if we shift the focus of our attention from the clouds to the sky.*

*Hold your attention on the stillness.*

What did you notice?

The sky and cloud analogy is a very useful one. As we discussed in Chapter 1, the sky is like our own true nature — vast, spacious, unstainable, pure. It is always there. The clouds represent our thoughts. Sometimes the sky can be clear and all that we notice is that spacious

blue sky. Other times the occasional white cloud drifts by. But even on the stormiest, cloudiest day, we know that up above it all, that clear blue sky is still very much there.

So this meditative process provides the “mechanics” of how to move past the clouds and rest in the presence of the sky-like nature of our own true being.

Let us continue.



## EXPERIMENT 6

*Take up your position for meditation. Relax briefly in your own way.*

*Notice any thoughts that come into your awareness.*

*Focus your attention on the gaps between the thoughts. Have the sense that the gaps introduce you to the silence, the ground over which the thoughts are passing.*

*Now this time, notice where the silence seems most obvious to you. Where is it located?*

*Perhaps the silence seems to be like a screen somewhere out in front of you (almost like a theatre screen) and the thoughts move across this screen.*

*Perhaps the silence seems to have another shape, another location. Seek it out.*

*Where is the silence most obvious to you?*

Where did you locate the silence? Where was it most obvious?

The range of descriptions of where the silence is located by different people, continues to amaze me. It seems that it is different for almost everyone, at least in some detail, at least at the beginning.

The point here, however, is that usually you can notice a focal point or location where the silence is most obvious.

Often this "location" is like a screen, sometimes centrally in front of you, sometimes off to one side, even sometimes behind or inside you. This screen-like image is usually 2-dimensional to begin with. Sometimes the "screen" is the classical rectangular shape, other shapes are possible. However, it is not the same for everyone. For some, the stillness appears to be almost like a small focal point either inside or outside the body.

The most important aspect of all this, is that again, you notice the duality. Notice where "you" seem to be and where the silence is most obvious.

Another brief experiment.



## EXPERIMENT 7

*Take up your position. Close your eyes and relax briefly in your own way.*

*Give your attention to your hands. It is usual to feel that your hands are more on your periphery and that you have a central point which is somewhere else. This central point is where that impartial observer is located.*

*So now, focus your attention at the point where your own "centre" seems to be located. Where does it feel that "you" are located? Where is your own central point?*

Where is it? Where is your central point? For many it is in that area between the eyes, a little up into the forehead. For some it is in the heart or throat, others find it elsewhere. There is no need to analyze this, just notice it. Where is your central point?

The value in this exercise is to notice that you, (the observer) are located in one place and generally (nearly always with these exercises) the stillness is in another.

Now to bring it together.





## EXPERIMENT 8

Give yourself more time for this experiment. It is ideal to have at least 20 minutes so that you can settle into the exercise and stay with it for a while.

*Take up your position. Relax briefly in your own way.*

*Notice any thoughts.*

*Notice the gaps between the thoughts.*

*Notice the silence.*

*Notice where the silence is most obvious. Where is it located?*

*Be aware of your own central point. Where is it located?*

*Now merge the two. Merge your own central point with the silence. Either draw the silence to you, enter into it, let go and allow yourself to dissolve in its presence; or move to the location of the silence and again let go, merge with it, dissolve into it.*

*Rest with this experience for as long as you choose.*

Keep practising. Enjoy yourself! Allow yourself to let go. Rest in the presence of your own true nature.

Be prepared for miracles!





## CHAPTER 8

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### A SUMMARY

## Putting the Preparation and the Practise Together

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Given all that we have experimented with, practised and learnt so far, when it comes to developing a full and satisfying practice of meditation, here are three useful principles to highlight:

1. The most important thing of all is that you practise regularly.
2. The best meditation technique for you is the simplest one that works.
3. Integrate your formal practise of meditation into your daily life.

### 1. How Often to Practise?

**Regularity and consistency are the keys.**

While any meditation, even ten minutes once a week, would have some positive benefit, real progress requires regular practise. Using the approach outlined here, most people find that twenty minutes a day is useful, twenty minutes twice a day, even better.

Some people, those who are really keen meditators, or those facing major health issues who need to get the most from meditation's healing potential, practise three times a day for as long as they feel it useful in each session. Usually, the upper limit for a session is an hour, so the higher limit for most people is three separate hours a day. In a retreat situation you may well benefit from the intensity of even more time. Often it is in those more intense retreat settings, particularly amidst noble company, that the major breakthroughs occur.

What is clear is that as you meditate regularly, instinctively you begin to know when more feels better and less is alright. After a while, if you just open to it a little, there is an inner knowing that will help you to set the right amount of time.

Most people do find that having a routine — meditating at the same time of day, going to the same place, having something of a preparatory ritual — helps to lead into effective meditation. Revise all the possibilities raised in the preparation sections and then experiment with them until you develop a routine that works for you.

## **2. What Type of Practise?**

**The simplest one that works!**

If simply being still works for you, that could well be complete and sufficient. If it does work for you to use no method, if you can simply let go and be still, why complicate it?

Remember the principles.



When you do need the assistance of a method, what you need is a technique that relaxes your body, calms your mind and then helps you to let go into silence.

### **Some Recommendations — Do whatever it takes**

Each time that you meditate, do take the time to relax physically — as much as you comfortably can in that particular session. How much conscious “effort” you will need to give to a relaxation method is likely to vary from day to day. Some days it can be all so easy. You sit down and it is almost as if you are deeply relaxed already. It is almost like there is nothing to do. Other days, perhaps after working in the garden, a trying day at work or stress at home, you need to really work at releasing physical tension and relaxing your body.

So it can be the same with the mind. It is common to have a range of experiences as you continue your practise. Some days it is easy. You feel the natural ease of it all. You let go almost effortlessly. Some days important issues almost seem to demand attention and perhaps the need is to consciously reflect and contemplate. At other times — a stream of frustrating, garbage thoughts and the need to use a method actively and consciously to calm your mind and move beyond the disturbing thoughts.

### **Using the Process of Meditation to enter the State of Meditation**

Remember that with good preparation, the state of meditation can arrive spontaneously. And always, the best meditation technique is the simplest one that works.

With practise comes skill and flexibility. You begin to do what works almost automatically, almost without thinking, almost without effort.

Perhaps you can simply let go; perhaps you have to work at it. The principle is that you do whatever it takes to relax physically, to calm the mind, and to let go. Always you use the simplest, most relaxed and direct method you can.

For the body then, learning the Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise, learning to simplify it and also taking time to do it in more detail, soon will have you able to relax quickly and deeply. Do take time each time you meditate to relax physically. Remember that with good preparation, true meditation can arise spontaneously.

For the mind, once you have prepared by relaxing physically and letting go with the Relaxation Response, you may be ready to observe whatever comes next. You may be able to simply let go, notice the stillness and directly enter into it.

Perhaps you need to give specific attention to noticing the gaps between the thoughts. You use the gaps to "locate" the silence and then merge with it.

Perhaps from time to time a sound passes by — just coming when it is ready and going when it is ready.

Perhaps from time to time a thought passes by — just coming when it is ready and going when it is ready.

It is as if you are immersed in the sky like nature of your true being, resting naturally, effortlessly in a state of union and balance.

If you become distracted at any time, perhaps it is enough just to notice the distraction and let it go. Per-



haps on occasion, you will need to return to the support of your method or technique, to regroup as it were, and to let go again.

### **Be gentle with yourself.**

Keep practising. Notice what works and do more of that. Let go of what does not help. Support your enthusiasm with books, tapes, groups, perhaps a retreat from time to time.

Be reminded that meditation is a discipline. While in the beginning this discipline requires an initial effort, as you practise more, develop a routine, feel the benefits and feel the enthusiasm; then ideally the discipline becomes easy. It is a discipline of ease. Meditation becomes a regular part of your daily life. Something to look forward to, to delight in! Be prepared to smile a whole lot more!

There is just one more major area to attend to, to complete all this.

## **3. Integrating the Practise**

Here we finish on a really important point. It is one thing to sit and do your formal practise. It is then a matter of taking the benefits of that practise with you and integrating your practise into your daily life.

This process of integration occurs in two ways — the first, an automatic flow on from regular practise, the second, a more conscious process of learning how to function in a more relaxed, calm and meditative way.

### **(a) MEDITATION'S AUTOMATIC BENEFITS<sup>1</sup>**

Firstly then, after each session of meditation there is a positive flow-on effect — almost like a positive meditation hangover! At first this flow-on effect lasts just a short time. This is why when you begin, it is recommended to meditate frequently. The more frequently, the more likely you are to pick up on the carry over from the previous session and rapidly notice strong benefits flowing into your daily life.

Some people say this automatic flow-on effect is enough. They trust that with frequent practise, all the benefits of meditation will simply happen in an effortless, natural sort of way.

This can happen. However, in my experience, many people find that their old patterns of behaviour, their old habits, do take a while to let go of or change, and that often working consciously at the process of integration can be another helpful practise.

### **(b) CONSCIOUSLY BRINGING MEDITATION INTO DAILY LIFE**

There are a number of useful exercises that you can learn and practise to speed up the integration of your formal practise into your daily life. Using these exercises will soon lead to you feeling more relaxed, calm and mindful.

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1. This is further detailed in Chapter 5, titled "Meditation in Action" of *Peace of Mind*, pages 77–86.



**(i) Practise in more challenging situations.**

We have considered in detail the fact that when you create the ideal conditions, meditation can arise spontaneously. Therefore, there is great benefit in practising in an ideal and conducive environment. However, as your practise develops, the advantage of using more challenging environments, such as noisy or uncomfortable places, is that you need to really focus and let go profoundly to get past these potential distractions.

By meditating in increasingly challenging situations, you develop meditation muscles. Then you can come to experience that inner calm, regardless of the external environment. This helps you to become more stable in your practise, as well as being more centred, resilient and at ease in daily life.

**(ii) Practise the Relaxation Response through the day.**

If stress and tension has been a part of your life for some time, you and your body will have become used to it. While you can let go of all this in the formal meditation sessions, and with time the relaxation and calm you experience there will manifest throughout the day, there can be extra benefit in consciously retraining your body to be relaxed and your mind to be calm.

Again, the need is to avoid your efforts to take the stress out of your life, from turning into something that makes you more stressed! If you

notice that paying attention to your levels of stress during the day is making you anxious, do drop this technique, keep meditating, and be prepared to benefit from the automatic flow-on effect.

However, many people can use these simple techniques enthusiastically and effectively. Basically it is a matter of reminding yourself through the day to let go of any tension, to calm your mind, relax, and be mindful.

Often it works best to determine to check your state of relaxation each time you do a standard thing. Stopping at red traffic lights is a great reminder for most city dwellers. Pause a moment, perhaps use a sigh as in that rapid relaxation exercise, check how your body feels, let go, centre and relax. Of course, the more familiar you are with how your body feels, which you learn thoroughly as you practise the PMR, the more effective this simple but important technique will be. Not that you become slack of course. You relax. You become calm and aware, alive and vital, ready for whatever is required.

Another good time is before each meal. Relax, let go a little. Take a moment to appreciate your food. Eat with awareness.

Similarly, when you finish one activity and before you start the next, pause, have a sense of completing whatever has been finished, let it go, relax, and focus your awareness on the new task.



Often as you practise these exercises, you notice where it is in your body that you tend to accumulate or store tension most. It may be helpful to focus your attention during these short moments of relaxation, on those particular trigger areas. Relaxing those key areas can often trigger a generalized feeling of relaxation.

**(iii) Functioning in a calm and relaxed fashion**

The real test is not how "good" you are at meditating; but how you are in daily life. What impact is your practise having on your state of being?

Again it can be useful to train yourself, to practise doing daily activities in a calm, relaxed and meditative way. Start with mundane tasks such as brushing your teeth, washing the dishes or preparing a meal. Notice how you are. How relaxed is your body? What is your state of mind? Are you in the past or future? Is anyone home? Are you in the moment? How mindful are you?

This is the testing ground of your meditation. Wonderful experiences during formal practise are one thing; how you are in simple tasks and daily life is the real measure of your progress.

Do be gentle with yourself in all this. Hopefully you will notice benefits rapidly. Hopefully those around you will notice something different in a pleasant and reassuring way. Remember that it is normal for life to flow in cycles, and fluctuations are to be expected.

With regular practise, however, there is the real prospect of moving beyond all that, of letting go of the busyness, of experiencing something more profound, more enduring. There is the very real prospect of reconnecting with your own true nature, your good heart. Once you do this, once you bring your mind home and reconnect with your essence, you will feel a deep contentment, a sense of balance and order that will stay with you through the ups and downs of normal life. You will still engage in "normal life", be an active and willing participant, but now everything will be different. There will be an ease and a confidence, a sense of inner peace and calm. And the smile will come from deep down — a smile that will linger through the years.

Happy meditating!





# MEDITATION PURE & SIMPLE

*People who meditate regularly seem to have something special about them.*

Perhaps it is their deeply contented smile.

Perhaps it is their natural good health.

Certainly, powerful medical research tells us that meditation reliably prevents illness, maximises performance, is a profound healing technique and leads to peace of mind.

Meditation achieves all this by restoring our natural state of balance. Once we re-establish an inner balance there is a flow-on-effect. Soon we experience physical balance and good health, emotional balance and poise, mental clarity and confidence, and spiritual harmony.

The real secret to all this is that this balance is found in a state of inner silence—Simple Silence. And all that we need to do to experience it is—be still—and there it is!

## SO HOW TO DO IT?

How to let go of life's busyness and be still?

How to relax physically and still the mind?

MEDITATION—PURE & SIMPLE delivers what it promises.

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**DR. IAN GAWLER** The inner world of Meditation and Imagery has been a major focus of Ian Gawler's life for over twenty years. Diagnosed with bone cancer, Ian's right leg was amputated in 1975, but the disease recurred later that year. Drawing upon a truly holistic approach he was fortunate to experience a remarkable recovery.

Ian holds a degree in Veterinary Science and a Masters in Counselling. In 1987 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for his services to the community.

Rs. 150

ISBN 978-81-7822-340-7



9 78 81 78 22 34 07



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